



NAACP

ADVOCACY.
IS THE NEW
BLACK

TAKE ACTION NOW

Visit [NAACP.ORG](https://naacp.org)

    [@NAACP](https://twitter.com/NAACP)

VISIT...

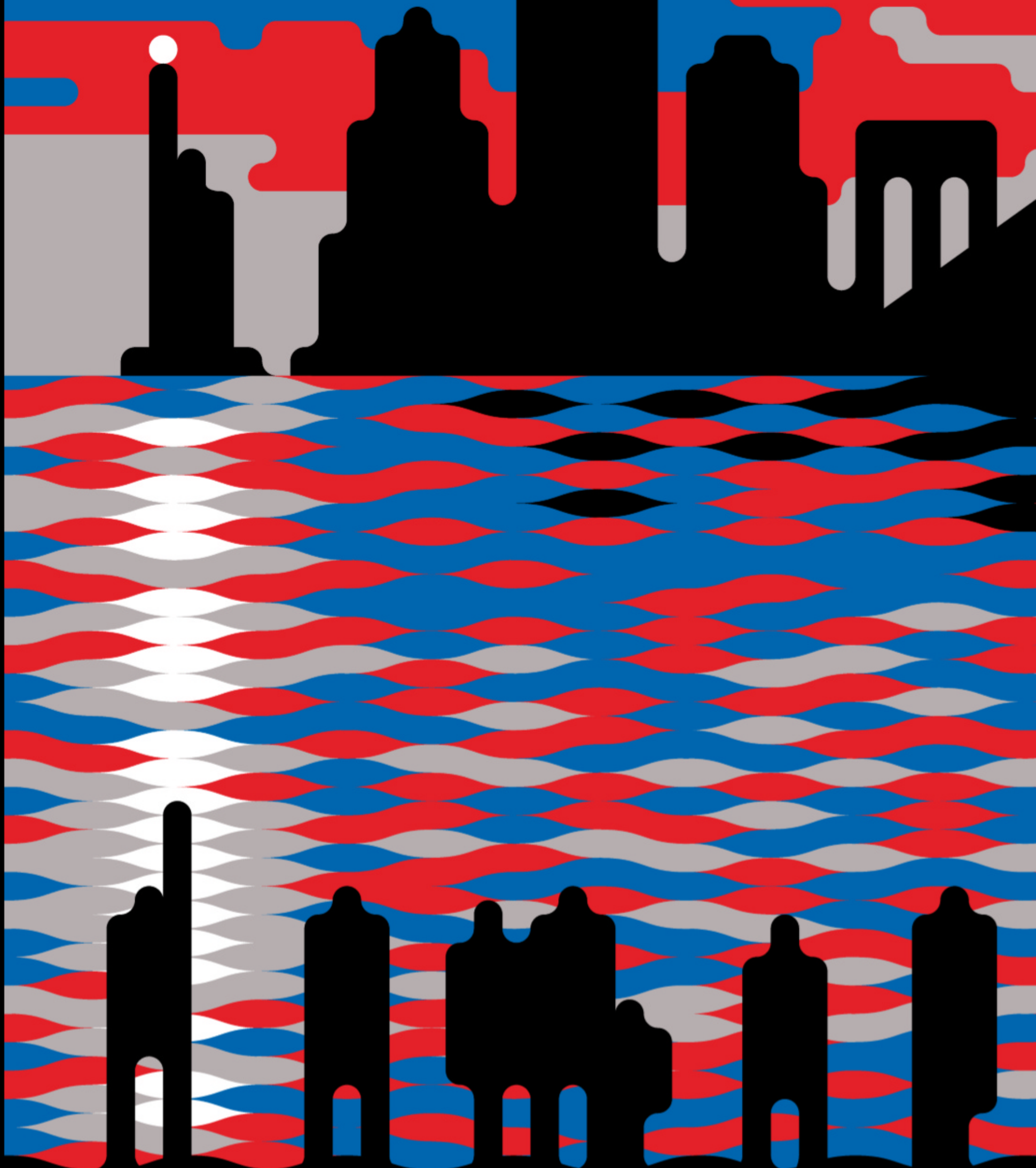
LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

PRICE \$8.99

THE

JULY 27, 2020

NEW YORKER



CN '20

PROMOTION

SEPTEMBER
2020

THE WIRED

THE
WIRED 25

2020 has seen a world in crisis, but leaders, scientists, technologists, and activists across the globe are working to make things better. This fall, the WIRED 25 list will honor these inspiring individuals.

Tune in this September to learn who made the list and how these change-makers, upstarts, and icons are solving the world's most intractable problems.

VISIT
[WIRED.COM/25](https://www.wired.com/25)

THE NEW YORKER

VOICES OF AMERICAN DISSENT

AN ARCHIVAL ISSUE

JULY 27, 2020

4 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

II THE TALK OF THE TOWN

*David Remnick on the legacy of John Lewis's bravery;
Langston Hughes remembered; N.Y.C. abortion battles;
COVID takes the mother of a trans Latinx community.*

LETTER FROM JACKSON

Calvin Trillin 16 Plane to Mississippi
Martin Luther King, Jr., debates a racist.

THE POLITICAL SCENE

Jelani Cobb 18 The Matter of Black Lives
How a movement found its moment.

PROFILES

Elizabeth Kolbert 24 The Catastrophist
A climate expert's unheeded warnings.

Hilton Als 30 Ghosts in the House
The singular storytelling of Toni Morrison.

Michael Specter 40 Public Nuisance
An AIDS activist speaks out and acts up.

FICTION

Shirley Jackson 50 "The Lottery"

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

Judith Thurman 54 *America's first female public intellectual.*

A CRITIC AT LARGE

Nathan Heller 60 *The rise and fall of Cesar Chavez.*

POEMS

Cornelius Eady 27 "Emmett Till's Glass-Top Casket"
Sandra Cisneros 44 "Still-Life with Potatoes, Pearls, Raw Meat,
Rhinestones, Lard, and Horse Hooves"

COVER

Christoph Niemann "Voices of Change"

DRAWINGS P. C. Vey, Liana Finck, Lonnie Millsap, Paul Noth, Frank Cotham,
David Sipress, Julia Suits, Edward Koren, Harry Bliss,
Roz Chast, Bishakh Som, Victoria Roberts, Maddie Dai, Lars Kenseth
SPOTS Tomi Um, Anthony Russo

CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Specter (“*Public Nuisance*,” p. 40), a staff writer at *The New Yorker* since 1998, is an adjunct professor of bioengineering at Stanford University.

Sandra Cisneros (*Poem*, p. 44) received the 2019 PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International Literature. Her books include the novel “The House on Mango Street,” the poetry collection “Loose Woman,” and the memoir “A House of My Own.”

Judith Thurman (*Books*, p. 54) first appeared in the magazine in 1987 and became a staff writer in 2000. She won the 2019 Mary McCarthy Award.

Ellen Willis (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 13), who died in 2006, was *The New Yorker*’s first pop-music critic.

Calvin Trillin (“*Plane to Mississippi*,” p. 16), a contributor to the magazine since 1963, has written thirty-one books, including “Jackson, 1964” and “About Alice.” The story in this issue is an excerpt of the original, which can be read in full on newyorker.com.

Elizabeth Kolbert (“*The Catastrophist*,” p. 24) has been a staff writer since 1999. Her book “*The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*” won the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction.

Jelani Cobb (“*The Matter of Black Lives*,” p. 18) teaches in the journalism program at Columbia University.

Shirley Jackson (*Fiction*, p. 50), who died in 1965, wrote six novels, including “The Haunting of Hill House” and “We Have Always Lived in the Castle.”

Cornelius Eady (*Poem*, p. 27) most recently published the chapbook “*The War Against the Obvious*.” He co-founded Cave Canem, which in 2016 received the National Book Foundation’s Literarian Award for Outstanding Service to the American Literary Community.

Charlayne Hunter-Gault (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 12) is the author of “In My Place,” “New News Out of Africa,” “To the Mountaintop,” and “Corrective Rape.”

Hilton Als (“*Ghosts in the House*,” p. 30), an associate professor of writing at Columbia University, won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for criticism. He will be a Presidential Visiting Scholar at Princeton University starting in the fall.

Christoph Niemann (*Cover*) has published numerous books, including “Sunday Sketching,” “Souvenir,” and “Hopes and Dreams.” This is his thirty-third cover for the magazine.

Masha Gessen (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 14), a staff writer, is the recipient of the 2017 National Book Award for nonfiction for “*The Future Is History*.” Their latest book is “*Surviving Autocracy*,” which came out last month.

Nathan Heller (*A Critic at Large*, p. 60), a staff writer, has contributed to the magazine since 2011. He is at work on a book about the Bay Area.

Hannah Goldfield (*Tables for Two*, p. 9) is the magazine’s food critic. She has contributed to *The New Yorker* since 2010.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



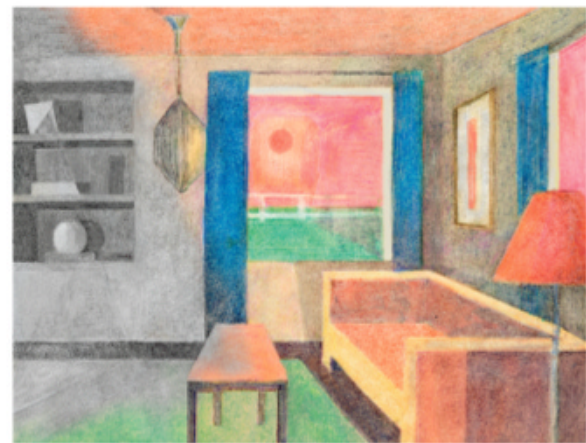
NEWS DESK

Lizzie Widdicombe on a couple’s trek to Ukraine, amid lockdown, to reach their surrogate-born baby.



LETTER FROM EUROPE

Elisabeth Zerofsky reports on how Munich turned its coronavirus outbreak into a scientific study.

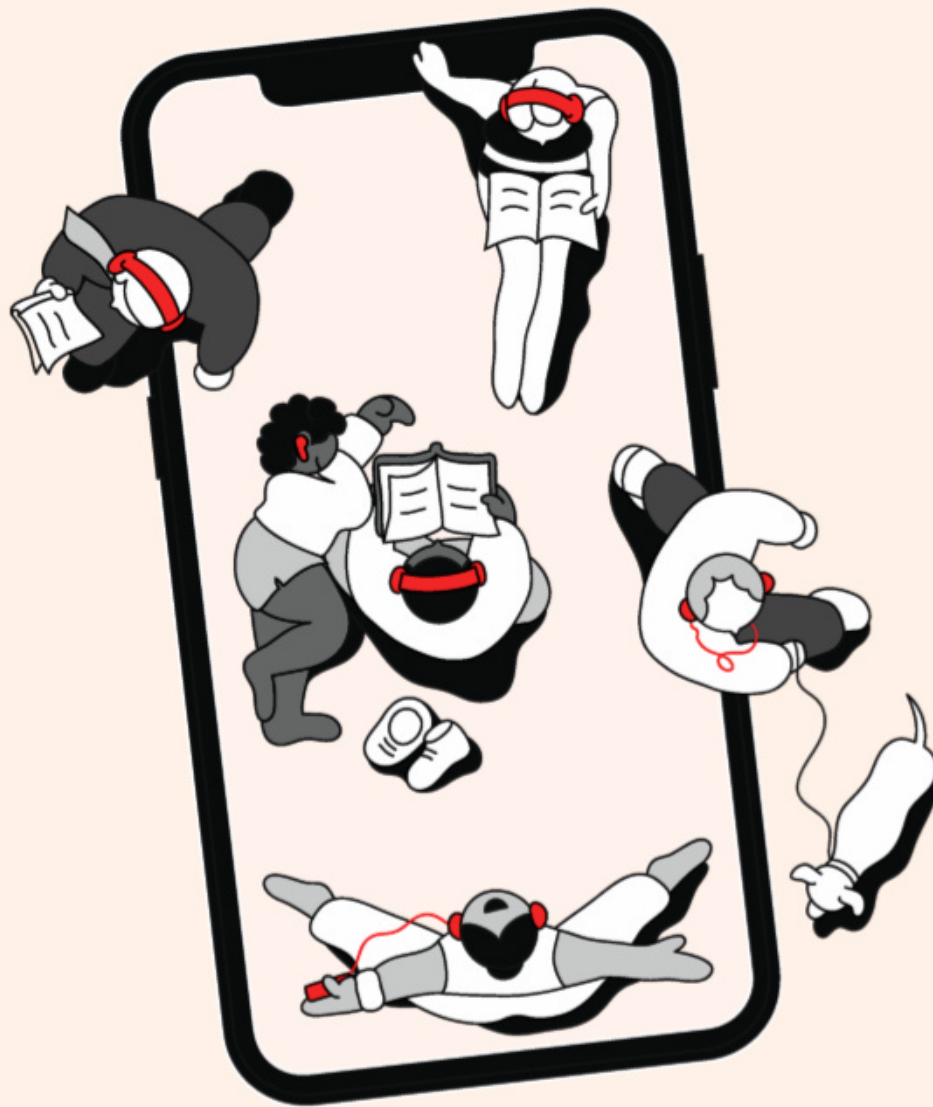


FLASH FICTION

Sheila Heti’s story “Grayness” is the second in *The New Yorker*’s online summer series of bite-size fiction.

Download the New Yorker app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week’s magazine and all issues back to 2008.

THE
NEW YORKER



Now hear this.

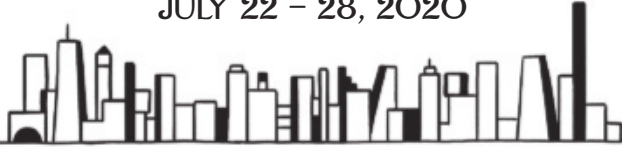
Narrated stories, along with podcasts,
are now available in the New Yorker app.

Download it at newyorker.com/app



In an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus, most New York City museums, galleries, theatres, music venues, and cinemas are closed. Here's a selection of culture to be found online and streaming.

JULY 22 – 28, 2020



GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The outdoor exhibition “Monuments Now,” at Socrates Sculpture Park, in Long Island City (through March), feels attuned to this unprecedented summer of American reckoning. The eye-catching ziggurat “Because Once You Enter My House, It Becomes Our House,” by **Jeffrey Gibson** (pictured)—a member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and a 2019 MacArthur Fellow—doubles as a stage for a trio of indigenous American artists, whose on-site performances will be filmed and released online.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVEN MOLINA CONTRERAS

MUSIC

The Beneficiaries: “The Crystal City Is Alive”

TECHNO At a moment when dance music’s spotlight is firmly on its African-American origins, the arrival of “The Crystal City Is Alive,” the debut album by the Detroit techno supergroup the Beneficiaries, is particularly well timed. To be fair, it would be notable at any time, if only because the project’s participants include the producers Jeff Mills and Eddie Fowlkes—two of the style’s key architects—and the poet Jessica Care Moore. Their cosmic beat-scapes evoke an incense-lined sitting area as much as a dance floor, and the set’s sprawl feels apt—reaching for the stars requires some elbow room.—*Michaelangelo Matos*

S. G. Goodman: “Old Time Feeling”

ROCK In June, S. G. Goodman made a video of the Depression-era song “I Don’t Want Your Millions, Mister” as part of a series supporting Charles Booker’s ultimately failed bid for the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate in Kentucky. Hidden beneath a mop of hair and mammoth granny glasses, Goodman sings in one of those ancient folk voices that reach back to the tune’s troubled era, but her lyrics address a bogeyman from the current one: “We don’t want you, Mitch McConnell.” The performance is not included on Goodman’s new album, “Old Time Feeling,” but the record is awash in its antique color and righteous spirit. The LP is a work of Southern leftism: a farmer’s proudly gay daughter applies singing that she learned in her Baptist church to rail against societal ills. Goodman’s prevailing tone involves less rage than it does forgiveness—which, more than any Kentucky lilt, makes the young singer appear refreshingly out of step with these divisive times.—*Jay Ruttenberg*

Tatiana Hazel: “Duality”

INDIE POP The Chicago-born singer Tatiana Hazel frequently pairs her homemade indie pop with music videos that are as colorful as fistfuls of confetti. Her bold aesthetic, inspired by her Mexican-American upbringing and her background as a fashion designer, has stood out since she began releasing music, in 2012, but with her new EP, “Duality,” her sound seems to have fully caught up to the bright intensity of her visual work. Hazel’s voice, which has always been gentle and slightly subdued, glides along effortlessly, even as she turns up the dial on her production and tests quaking, dance-driven electronic beats. Each part of her artistry comes together on “IN MY ROOM!,” an inward yet empowered breakup song that pulses with neon, eighties-inspired synth lines.—*Julyssa Lopez*

“prisoner of the state”

OPERA David Lang is a canny architect of modern music. In the New York Philharmonic’s new recording of Lang’s opera “prisoner of

the state,” with the conductor Jaap van Zweden, the composer doesn’t necessarily change the way we hear the orchestra—the strings yearn and shiver, the percussion thumps and forebodes, the vocal lines rise effortlessly out of the instrumental texture—but his keen efficiency directs our attention to each section’s impact. The opera reimagines the plot of Beethoven’s “Fidelio” as an investigation of authoritarianism’s abuses and pernicious appeal. Lang’s originality lies in the Governor (sung by the ingratiating tenor Alan Oke): the composer transforms Beethoven’s cardboard villain into a despot who quotes Machiavelli and sings sleepy, seductive arias about holding his constituents in thrall and lulling them into complacency. When the Governor is shot in the finale, he doesn’t die; authoritarianism, as a mind-set, outlives any one practitioner after it takes root in the citizenry.—*Oussama Zahr*

Max Roach: “We Insist!”

JAZZ The original cover art for the 1960 album “We Insist!: Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite” shows three Black men taking their rightful place at a presumably off-lim-

its lunch counter, making it instantly clear that the drummer and bandleader Roach, who was by then legendary, and his cohorts meant business. Gathering up-and-coming players (including the trumpeter Booker Little), venerated veterans (the tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins), the percussionist Babatunde Olatunji, and the vocalist Abbey Lincoln, Roach produced a pointed musical statement that addresses African-American history and celebrates African peoples with passion. The album’s climax, “Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace,” is a haunting, wordless duet between Roach and Lincoln that transforms contemplation into a defiant wail of anger in its central movement. Revisited sixty years later, the album retains all its bite and intransigence.—*Steve Futterman*

Tanglewood Online Festival

CLASSICAL The venerable Tanglewood Music Festival, the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, has reimagined its season with a schedule of newly taped recitals and archival programs, both free and ticketed. This week’s lineup of fresh fare includes a performance by the adventurous

HIP-HOP



The sound of dissent takes many forms—voices rising, chants echoing. In New York, dissent also sounds like **Pop Smoke**. The Canarsie-born rapper, who was shot and killed, in February, at a Hollywood Hills home he was renting, was known for his low, rumbling style of Brooklyn drill, which, as Pitchfork and *Nylon* have noted, has recently filled the streets and shaped the soundtrack of local Black Lives Matter protests. Songs such as “Dior,” with its roaring, rallying spirit, capture the current moment, but Pop Smoke’s posthumous album, “Shoot for the Stars Aim for the Moon,” is a flash into a future that never was. His signature bark has been tempered for radio-friendly production, resulting in a surprisingly commercial project, with guest spots by the likes of 50 Cent and Karol G. Softened performances on “What You Know Bout Love” and “Something Special” illuminate new sides of the artist, yet, even in those quieter glimpses, his presence looms large—an enduring force, too big to contain.—*Julyssa Lopez*

THEATRE FESTIVAL

The dauntless **Ice Factory Festival**, typically held at the West Village's New Ohio Theatre, is trying something new for its twenty-seventh year: live-streaming four original works in four weeks. "Beginning Days of True Jubilation" (July 24-26), from the ensemble Society, satirizes the groupthink and utopianism of tech startups. "We Need Your Listening" (July 30-Aug. 2) embraces the hurdles of virtual theatre by creating one-on-one exchanges between performers and spectators. The Transit Ensemble's "Who's There?" (Aug. 4-8), featuring artists from the U.S., Singapore, and Malaysia, tackles post-George Floyd racial politics across continents. And the musical "A Burning Church" (Aug. 13-15) contemplates, in the form of a virtual religious service, the role of worship in American liberation. Visit newohiotheatre.org.—*Michael Schulman*

string quartet Brooklyn Rider (July 22) that mixes Beethoven with Philip Glass, Caroline Shaw, and Matana Roberts. A starry centenary salute to Isaac Stern (July 23) features the violinists Vadim Gluzman, Midori, and Nancy Zhou, and a recital by the violinist Augustin Hadelich and the pianist Orion Weiss (July 25) includes music by Brahms, Debussy, and John Adams.—*Steve Smith* (July 22-28.)

DANCE

City Center Live @ Home: Ayodele Casel

The eloquent tap dancer Ayodele Casel believes in expressing herself not just through her feet but also through her words, and her "Diary of a Tap Dancer" shows have effectively combined dance with verbal reflections on why she dances. A new, virtual version of the project allows tap dancers to give voice to how they are living in this moment. Each Tuesday through Aug. 25, another short video débuts on New York City Center's Web site, and though Casel appears in one, she is mainly passing the mike to others, including the veteran showman Ted Levy, Michela Marino Lerman, and Lisa La Touche.—*Brian Seibert* (nycitycenter.org/tap)

DTH on Demand: "Dougla"

The 1974 dance "Dougla," by Geoffrey Holder, should not be mistaken for authentic folklore. Its commingling of African-inspired and Indian-accented dance—an evocation of the hybrid Dougla culture of Trinidad, Holder's birthplace—is hardly ethnographically precise. What "Dougla" offers



instead is a lively, vivid pageant—colorful costumes, powerful rhythms, and scores of dancers moving in mesmerizing patterns across the stage. "Dougla," long a staple of Dance Theatre of Harlem's repertoire, was shelved several years ago, when the company was forced to scale down. The piece's return, in 2018, was a sign of the ensemble's renewed health, reason enough to celebrate. Starting on July 25, at 8 P.M., it will be broadcast on the company's YouTube page.—*Marina Harss* (dancetheatreofharlem.org/dthondemand)

Jacob's Pillow

The virtual version of the Pillow's summer festival continues, on July 23, with a program by Ronald K. Brown, the deserving winner of this year's Jacob's Pillow Dance Award. The tentpole is a 2005 performance of "Grace," Brown's perennially uplifting signature piece. But the selections also include a remarkable 2002 show in which Brown danced in supple tribute to Katherine Dunham, a predecessor whose work, in the nineteen-thirties and forties, brought dances of the African diaspora to the concert stage. And from his company's most recent visit to the Pillow, in 2018, comes "New Conversations," a many-layered collaboration with the Afro-Latino composer and bandleader Arturo O'Farrill.—*B.S.* (jacobspillow.org/virtual-pillow)

JoyceStream: A.I.M

Through Aug. 14, the Joyce Theatre streams Kyle Abraham's "Meditation: A Silent Prayer." The ten-minute work, made in 2018 and still all too topical, is not silent. Cutting through a mournful mist of strings are harrowing sounds: the voice of Carrie Mae Weems listing the names and ages of Black people killed by the police; audio from the

aftermath of Philando Castile's death. The dance is a prayer, though, one with muted, delicate, pained beauty.—*B.S.* (joyce.org/joycestream)

PlayBAC / Aszure Barton

Artists' residencies are at the heart of the Baryshnikov Arts Center's mission. Back in 2005, one of those artists was Aszure Barton, a young Canadian choreographer with a ballet background and an eccentric sensibility. "Over/Come," a work for thirteen dancers set to love songs by Giorgio Conte and Andy Williams, was the fruit of her time there. It's an enigmatic piece that's seemingly about love, not all of it happy. The dancers vamp and flirt, couple up and separate. The tone veers from ironic to vulnerable to bubbly. Along the way, Barton reveals the dancers' distinct personalities. "Over/Come" broadcasts July 23-28.—*M.H.* (bacnyc.org/explore)

THE THEATRE

The Line

Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, the co-creators of "The Exonerated" and "Coal Country," are among the foremost practitioners of documentary theatre in the U.S. Their latest show, with the Public Theatre, is an emotional and, yes, political gut punch. Blank (who also directed) and Jensen built the script out of interviews with New York City medical first responders—portrayed with a sobriety that does not exclude simmering passion by such superb actors as Santino Fontana, John Ortiz, Alison Pill, Nicholas Pinnock, and Lorraine Toussaint. In a little more than an hour, "The Line" takes us through the horrific escalation of COVID-19 cases that pushed New York to the brink in the spring. The stories are simultaneously infuriating and affecting, unsparing and gentle. Aimee Mann's song "Batten Down" makes for a stark, haunting conclusion as it plays over photos of real-life responders.—*Elisabeth Vincentelli* (publictheater.org)

ART

Jean-Marie Appriou

Three mammoth horses haunt the southeast entrance to Central Park in this French artist's Public Art Fund commission—benevolent, dispassionate, and disintegrating. None of the cobbled-together, cast-aluminum creatures is entirely whole. One sits watchfully, earless; another stands, its chest sliced through horizontally, creating a flat surface; the elongated torso of the third is bent into an archway. Facing Appriou's poignant sentinels from inside the Park offers a glimpse of Augustus Saint-Gaudens's gilded-bronze statue of William Tecumseh Sherman, in Grand Army Plaza, where the Union general rides a horse led by a winged goddess—a very different kind of equestrian sculpture. Appriou's horses, whose pedestal-free forms allow pedestrians to wander underneath and around them, seem like anti-monuments in contrast with that lofty symbol of official

glory—perhaps the artist is even paying respect to the humble, hardworking carriage horses perpetually waiting nearby, on Fifty-ninth Street.—*Johanna Fateman (Doris C. Freedman Plaza)*

Leidy Churchman

Is there anything Leidy Churchman can't paint? Among the subjects of the twenty-one paintings in the New York phenom's show at the Matthew Marks gallery, which was interrupted by the pandemic, are a fever-dream bedroom, a moonrise, a girl on a bike, a rose garden, a monkey-filled forest from the Ramayana, hypnotic abstractions, and a laundry-room sign. The palette runs from monochrome black to hot purple and pink; dimensions change from a scant dozen inches to more than ten feet. The only logic at work is intuitive, even oracular. The mood is less image-overload restless than it is optimistically omnivorous—Churchman seems hungry to paint the whole world in all its mystery and ordinariness, two categories that often collide here. In Churchman's deft hands, a cropped closeup of an iPhone 11 assumes a third-eye mysticism worthy of Hilma af Klint. (The exhibition is now open to the public, by appointment only, through July 31; Churchman's paintings remain on view on the gallery's Web site.)—*Andrea K. Scott (matthewmarks.com)*

Mike Nudelman and Sophie Varin

Fortnight Institute unites two far-flung artists—Nudelman lives in Santa Fe, and Varin is based in Brussels—who share a fondness for working small and for channelling the otherworldly. (The gallery is now open by appointment, but the intimate nature of both shows also makes for rapt viewing online.) Many of Nudelman's subtle ballpoint-pen drawings are based on photographs taken in the nineteen-seventies by Eduard Albert (Billy) Meier, a Swiss man who believed that he was documenting U.F.O.s. Nudelman renders the saucerlike forms, visible in the distance through bare-branched trees and above rolling hills, with a light touch and a meticulous hatching technique that suggests a grainy Kodachrome lustre. Similarly seductive hazes grace Varin's thinly painted, matchbook-size canvases. In one of her landscapes, a golden body of water and blue cliffs above a cove are pushed to the edge of abstraction by the inclusion of peach and cadmium-red stripes. Elsewhere, tiny figures seem to float in shimmering fields of vibrant color. The only portrait in Varin's show, a closeup titled "Inquiet," has an ethereal chartreuse face (think little green men) that echoes Nudelman's extraterrestrial theme.—*J.F. (fortnight.institute)*

"Vida Americana"

This thumpingly great show at the Whitney, subtitled "Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1924-1945," picks an overdue art-historical fight. The usual story revolves around young, often immigrant aesthetes striving to absorb European modernism. A triumphalist tale composed backward from its climax—the postwar success of Abstract Expressionism—it

brushes aside the prevalence, in the thirties, of politically themed figurative art: social realism, more or less, which became ideologically toxic with the onset of the Cold War. What to do with the mighty legacy of the era's big three Mexican painters, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros? As little as possible has seemed the rule, despite the seminal influence of Orozco and Siqueiros on the young Jackson Pollock. But, with some two hundred works by sixty artists and abundant documentary material, the curator Barbara Haskell reweaves the sense and sensations of the time to bring it alive. Without the Mexican precedents of amplified scale and passionate vigor, the development of Abstract Expressionism lacks crucial sense. As for the politics, consider the persistently leftward tilt of American art culture ever since—a residual hankering, however sotto voce, to change the world. (The Whitney is temporarily closed, but a selection of the show's works and related videos is available online.)—*Peter Schjeldahl (whitney.org)*

ART ONLINE



Early in her rhapsodic forty-minute film, "The Giverny Document (Single Channel)," from 2019, the American artist **Ja'Tovia Gary** is seen standing on a street in Harlem asking women, "Do you feel safe in your body?" (A still is pictured above.) One answer declares a collective truth: "It's already not easy being Black." These cinéma-vérité interviews flow in and out of dreamy direct-film animations, indelible self-portrait tableaux staged in Claude Monet's garden, and extensive found footage, including scenes of Josephine Baker, Nina Simone, and the fatal police shooting of Philando Castile, captured by his fiancée, Diamond Reynolds. The intricate subject of Gary's moving-image mosaic is Black women's lives—and the faith that pain can transform into power. Reconfigured into three parts in museums and galleries—and accompanied by two altars to African goddesses—the piece has made Gary a rising star in the art world. Earlier this month, she released the film on YouTube. "I wanted as many Black women as possible to be able to view the film without having to negotiate access with institutions," she recently told me. "People who I am making the work for, who I am in direct communication with, need to have an immediate link to it."—*Andrea K. Scott*

MOVIES

The Lenny Bruce Performance Film

Lenny Bruce's performances—such as this, his penultimate one, from 1965, in San Francisco—reflect, in wild comedy, his own stringent morality, which starkly contrasted with the morals of the time. The previous year, he'd been convicted, in New York, on charges of obscenity; he could perform in California because he'd won an obscenity case there. His time in court sparked his obsession with the law; in his terrifying journey through its labyrinths, he became a standup Kafka. In this show, the transcript of the New York trial is his script, and he performs it with gusto. His confrontation with authority is his master plot—his quest to speak freely about sex and politics, and his paradoxical view of his persecutors' passions. Indeed, Bruce, who was Jewish, launches into a profound, uproarious

digression—mocking liberals and praising the censorious—about Jews’ and Catholics’ divergent attitudes toward sex. Bruce’s legal travails ruined him, but they also nourished his art, transforming him into an outlaw philosopher of law.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on YouTube.)*

1971

This documentary, from 2014, by Johanna Hamilton, unpacks a crucial but little-known episode in modern political and journalistic history. On March 8, 1971, eight antiwar activists broke into a small F.B.I. office in the aptly named town of Media, Pennsylvania, and stole files documenting the government’s attempted suppression of legitimate dissent. They then mailed copies to the *Washington Post*, which, despite government pressure, reported on the files. The eight perpetrators were never found. Hamilton films five of them admitting to the break-in and

describing the scheme. The story, including its cat-and-mouse aftermath, combines the intricate excitement of a thriller with righteous historical outrage, and highlights the grave threat to freedom posed by politicized law-enforcement officials. The activists’ revelations, plus a crucial follow-up with two of the film’s interviewees—the journalists Betty Medsger, who broke the story in the *Post*, and Carl Stern—ultimately led to Senate hearings in 1975 (where dirty tricks against Martin Luther King, Jr., were disclosed). Only unimaginative reenactments mar the fine fabric of Hamilton’s cinematic journalism.—*R.B. (Streaming on Amazon.)*

Red Hollywood

Thom Andersen and Noël Burch’s extraordinary documentary, from 1996, about the postwar persecution and purge of Communists in the movie business, gathers and analyzes an alluring selec-

tion of film clips showcasing the work of writers, directors, and actors who were investigated by the government and blacklisted by the industry. (Targeted directors included such luminaries as Nicholas Ray, Abraham Polonsky, Joseph Losey, Orson Welles, and Charlie Chaplin.) Andersen and Burch brilliantly contextualize the clips with onscreen interviews and with their own incisive commentary (spoken by Billy Woodberry), which reveals the films’ hidden political references alongside overt ones. The documentarians show that Hollywood’s frankest depictions of twentieth-century history—including the Depression, labor conflicts, Jim Crow, the Spanish Civil War, the rise of fascism in Europe, the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the economic subordination of American women—were the work of Communists; when they were purged from the studios, their subjects of interest were purged, too, leaving Hollywood stuck in politically timid conformity.—*R.B. (Streaming on Kanopy and Sundance Now.)*

WHAT TO STREAM



William Greaves, who directed the metafictional masterwork “Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One,” made documentaries of similar originality, including “**Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice**,” from 1989 (now streaming on Kanopy and YouTube). Wells, who was born enslaved in 1862, a year before emancipation, started her career as a schoolteacher. In Memphis, in 1887, outraged by an unsuccessful court battle protesting her removal from a train car on the basis of race, she became a journalist and activist whose work proved vastly influential, even internationally. With investigative rigor and insightful political strategizing, she publicized and challenged the horrors of lynchings, defended the civil rights of Black people, and resisted the erasure of Black American history. Greaves depicts Wells’s life and work fervently, joining excerpts from Wells’s memoirs (read on camera by Toni Morrison), interviews with scholars (including Paula Giddings and Troy Duster, Wells’s grandson), and his own written narration (spoken by Al Freeman, Jr.) with teeming visual documentation. In counterpoint with the voices on the soundtrack, he brings a dramatic array of engravings, photographs, and printed archives to life with great imaginative power.—*Richard Brody*

Seberg

Kristen Stewart, armed with short-cropped hair and spiky emotional responses, digs deep into the role of Jean Seberg. Benedict Andrews’s movie takes us through just one of the many dismaying chapters in the actress’s life. The story begins, appropriately, in 1968, in Paris, where Seberg lives with her husband, Romain Gary (Yvan Attal). On a flight to America, she meets an activist named Hakim Jamal (Anthony Mackie), and she not only embarks on an affair with him but also starts devoting her energies, and her money, to radical causes. As a result, the F.B.I. agents Jack Solomon (Jack O’Connell) and Carl Kowalski (Vince Vaughn) are instructed to spy on her, and thereafter to trash her reputation with leaks and lies. The consequences for her mental health are cruel and lasting. The film is at its strongest, unsurprisingly, when Stewart holds center stage; elsewhere, the focus of dramatic attention seems to wander.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 12/16/19.) (Streaming on Amazon Prime.)*

She’s Beautiful When She’s Angry

This stirring and informative documentary, directed by Mary Dore, about the rise of the women’s movement in the United States, between 1966 and 1971, is a wise and impassioned blend of historical clips and interviews with many of the movement’s leaders. Dore traces the movement back to Betty Friedan’s book “*The Feminine Mystique*” and to the civil-rights movement, with tributaries from the antiwar movement and New Left student groups. The movie’s analytical perspective emphasizes vast changes brought about by small groups of women. (The Jane Collective, in Chicago, which provided abortions when they were illegal, is an exemplary portrait in courage.) Dore shows the divergence between the practical and the radical, suggesting that the movement’s excesses cost it influence. The film’s view of more recent events is thin, and some dramatizations are distracting, but the over-all portrayal, of a time of constant meetings and conversations that gave voice to stifled frustrations and united untapped energies, is visionary and heroic. Released in 2014.—*R.B. (Streaming on Amazon Prime, Kanopy, and other services.)*

For more reviews, visit
newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town



TABLES FOR TWO

Ras Plant Based

739 Franklin Ave., Brooklyn

Many of the recipes that the chef Romeo Regalli uses in the kitchen at Ras Plant Based—the restaurant that he and his wife, Milka, opened in Crown Heights in March—have been passed down through generations. A number of them came from Romeo’s grandmother, a passionate home cook who died last year, in Ethiopia, at the age of a hundred and four. Yet the dish that seems most likely to have a long, storied history, Mama’s Tofu, traces its origins only as far back as May, when Romeo’s mother texted, from Addis Ababa, a photo of what she had made for dinner. “I was, like, ‘Oh, my God, that looks so good!’” Romeo recalled the other day. She rattled off the ingredients: tofu, tomatoes, onions, and jalapeños. After she mailed him a batch of her homemade spice mix (the exact contents of which he keeps tight to his chest), Romeo made an approximation, and promptly added it to the menu.

The story behind Mama’s Tofu reflects the restaurant’s ethos: dynamic, adaptable, rooted in but by no means bound by tradition. Romeo and Milka, who were both

born in Ethiopia, met while working at Milka’s mother’s Ethiopian restaurant, Awash, on the Upper West Side, and had long wanted to open a place of their own, with a vegan menu. Although meat figures prominently in Ethiopian cuisine, vegan dishes are common, too; for more than a hundred and fifty days a year, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians abstain from animal products, in accordance with religious fasting. The couple wanted to both feature their favorite fasting dishes and rejigger typical meat preparations with substitutes like crumbled pea protein, to “cater to those who are trying to transition to a vegan life style,” Romeo explained.

Ras Plant Based was up and running for all of a week before the pandemic forced the Regallis to close the dining room they had worked so hard to get ready, commissioning colorful murals and arranging patio-style furniture for a breezy al-fresco vibe. Cutting back on staff and shifting to takeout meant paring down the menu and reducing their hours. They have recently added limited outdoor seating, but a playful brunch menu, offering cauliflower wings and waffles and Ethiopian breakfast classics, remains on hold for now.

Even in an abridged form, Ras is an exciting addition to Franklin Avenue’s ever-bustling restaurant row. Flaky *sambusas* (the Ethiopian equivalent to what’s called a samosa in South Asia and elsewhere), stuffed with either lentils or chopped cabbage, onion, and bell pepper, come two per order. As soon as their slightly honeyed, deep-fried scent hit

my nose the other night, I knew that I should have added at least a half-dozen to my takeout cart; that thought was confirmed after I dipped them into Ras’s glossy-red *awaze*, a saucy paste usually made with berbere (Ethiopia’s national spice mix, which includes chili pepper, ginger, basil, and fenugreek) that here releases a balanced, slow-building heat.

For a cold dish called *fitfit*, house-made injera—the porous, slightly sticky national flatbread of Ethiopia, made from a deliciously sour fermented teff-flour dough—is torn into pieces and combined with tomato, onion, and jalapeño, all doused in a puckery lime vinaigrette. More injera, rolled into squishy cigars, to be unfurled for scooping, comes with a vegan sampler platter, which showcases an array of fasting dishes, including *missir*, long-simmered red lentils complexly layered with more of the secret spice mix (I picked up cardamom), and *fasolia*, a slick tangle of string beans and carrots slow-cooked until silky and sweet.

In two iterations of *tibs*, for which beef is usually both fried and stewed with onions and berbere, the meat is replaced by seitan and cremini mushrooms, respectively, the former bearing a texture as satisfying as pork belly, the latter with an earthiness enhanced by sprigs of rosemary. Both are wonderful sopped up with more injera or with turmeric-stained steamed rice laced with fresh black pepper. Both are worthy of ancestral legacy—and how lucky we are to be welcomed into this family. (Dishes \$5–\$19.)

—Hannah Goldfield

Introducing Schwab Stock Slices™

Now anyone can own any of
America's leading companies in
the S&P 500® for as little as \$5,
even if their shares cost more.



Buy a single slice for as little as \$5.

			
AMOUNT INVESTED	\$5	\$5	\$5
SHARE PRICE	\$364	\$227	\$455
SHARE %	1.4%	2.2%	1.1%

Or buy up to 10 slices of companies
for as little as \$5 each.



All corporate names, logos, and prices are for illustrative purposes only and are not a recommendation, an offer to sell, or a solicitation of an offer to buy any security.

Schwab Stock Slices is a simple, low-cost way to start investing.
You can buy a single slice or bundle up to 10 companies in one
purchase. You can also buy slices in a custodial account to give the
gift of stock ownership. And, of course, you can trade Stock Slices
commission-free online, just as you would regular stocks at Schwab.¹

Learn more at schwab.com/stocksllices.



Own your tomorrow.

¹The standard online \$0 commission does not apply to trades placed through a broker (\$25) or by automated phone (\$5). See the *Charles Schwab Pricing Guide for Individual Investors* for full fee and commission schedules. Availability may be limited, plans are subject to change, and other exclusions or conditions may apply.

Schwab Stock Slices is not intended to be investment advice or a recommendation of any stock. Investing in stocks can be volatile and involves risk including loss of principal. Consider your individual circumstances prior to investing.

The "S&P 500® Index" is a product of S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC or its affiliates ("SPDJI"), and has been licensed for use by Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. ("CS&Co"). Standard & Poor's® and S&P® are registered trademarks of Standard & Poor's Financial Services LLC ("S&P"); Dow Jones® is a registered trademark of Dow Jones Trademark Holdings LLC ("Dow Jones"). Schwab Stock Slices is not sponsored, endorsed, sold or promoted by SPDJI, Dow Jones, S&P, or their respective affiliates, and none of such parties make any representation regarding the advisability of using Schwab Stock Slices or investing in any security available through Schwab Stock Slices, nor do they have any liability for any errors, omissions, or interruptions of the S&P 500 Index.

The trademarks/logos appearing in this ad are owned by their respective owners and are used for informational purposes only to identify the public companies whose stock may be available for purchase through the Schwab Stock Slices™ program and does not indicate any relationship, sponsorship, or endorsement between Charles Schwab and any of the companies that own those trademarks/logos. Share prices are as of 6/30/20 and will vary based on market conditions. Share % is of one share truncated to one decimal point.

©2020 Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Member SIPC. CC4140779 (0620-05Y3) ADP111464-00 (07/20) 00247418



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT REDEEMING AMERICA

John Robert Lewis was born in 1940 near the Black Belt town of Troy, Alabama. His parents were sharecroppers, and he grew up spending Sundays with a great-grandfather who was born into slavery, and hearing about the lynchings of Black men and women that were still a commonplace in the region. When Lewis was a few months old, the manager of a chicken farm named Jesse Thornton was lynched about twenty miles down the road, in the town of Luverne. His offense was referring to a police officer by his first name, not as “Mister.” A mob pursued Thornton, stoned and shot him, then dumped his body in a swamp; it was found, a week later, surrounded by vultures.

These stories, and the realities of Jim Crow-era segregation, prompted Lewis to become an American dissident. Steeped in the teachings of his church and the radio sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr., he left home for Nashville, to study theology and the tactics of nonviolent resistance. King teased him as “the boy from Troy,” the youngest face at the forefront of the movement. In a long career as an activist, Lewis was arrested forty-five times and beaten repeatedly by the police and by white supremacists, most famously in Selma, on March 7, 1965—Bloody Sunday—when he helped lead six hundred people marching for voting rights. After they had peacefully crossed a bridge, Alabama troopers attacked, using tear gas, clubs, and bullwhips. Within moments of their charge,

Lewis lay unconscious, his skull fractured. He later said, “I thought I was going to die.”

Too often in this country, seeming progress is derailed, reversed, or overwhelmed. Bloody Sunday led directly to the passage of the Voting Rights Act—and yet suppressing the Black vote is a pillar of today’s Republican Party strategy. The election of the first African-American President was followed by a bigot running for election, and now reelection, on a platform of racism and resentment. The murder of Jesse Thornton has its echoes in the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others. Indeed, to this day, the bridge where Lewis nearly lost his life is named in honor of Edmund Pettus, a U.S. senator who was a Confederate officer and a Grand Dragon of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan.

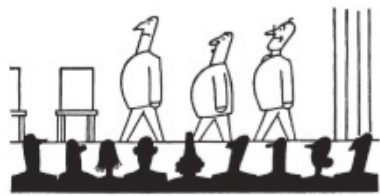
And so there were times when Lewis,

who died on Friday, at the age of eighty, might have felt the temptation at times to give up, to give way. But it was probably his most salient characteristic that he always refused despair; with open eyes, he acknowledged the darkest chapters of American history yet insisted that change was always possible. Recently, he took part in a Zoom town hall with Barack Obama and a group of activists, and told them that he had been inspired by the weeks of demonstrations for racial justice across the country. The protesters, he said, will “redeem the soul of America and move closer to a community at peace with itself.”

Dissent is an essential component of the American story and the American future. In that spirit, we bring you this archival issue of *The New Yorker*, republishing Profiles, reporting, essays, fiction, and poetry on this theme. Some of the figures written about here were dissenters in the public arena, like Dr. King, Margaret Fuller, and Cesar Chavez, who set out to battle the established order of racism, misogyny, and exploitation. Others were artists, like Langston Hughes and Toni Morrison, who provide the vision and the language to understand our predicament and, perhaps, to help transform it. And then there are those, like the scientist James Hansen, whose bravery is to insist on the validity of fact, when willful ignorance can lead to the catastrophic warming of the planet—or to the spread of a deadly virus. All of them persevered against countless obstacles even as they knew they might not live to see their most fundamental struggles concluded.

—David Remnick





On a miserably wet evening seven months after the death of Langston Hughes, we sat, almost comfortably (except for our damp feet), in the cavernous Wollman Auditorium, at Columbia University, and listened to the low, bemused voice of Hughes on tape as, against a taped musical background, it sent his “Weary Blues” floating over a group of people who had assembled to pay tribute to him. The program, “A Langston Hughes Memorial Evening,” was sponsored by The Forum, which is, in the words of its nineteen-year-old president, Bruce Kanze, “a student organization that brings to the University interesting people whom the University itself would never consider bringing, to discuss issues and topics that are important.”

A few minutes after eight, when nearly every seat was filled, three men walked onto the stage: Leon Bibb, the actor and singer; Jonathan Kozol, author of “Death at an Early Age”; and Professor James P. Shenton, of Columbia. (“He teaches a course on Reconstruction—the closest thing to a course on Negro history at Columbia,” Mr. Kanze told us later.) They were soon joined by Miss Viveca Lindfors, the actress, who was wearing a pale-gray fur coat but removed it as she was sitting down, and gracefully placed it over her mini-exposed knees.

Professor Shenton, who had to leave early, was introduced, and hurried to the microphone. “I am here partly as a way of saying for Columbia that we owe some apologies,” he said solemnly. “For a while, there lived a poet down the street from Columbia, and Columbia never took the time to find out what he was about.” The Professor paused for a few seconds, and then continued, “For a while, there lived a poet down the street from Columbia, who even attended Columbia for a while, and yet he never received an honorary degree from here. When we buried him, *then* we gave him a memorial. But, after all, that’s the experience of the black man down the street from Columbia.”

Professor Shenton left the platform, and Mr. Kozol, a slim young man wearing rimless glasses, came to the microphone. In 1965, he was discharged from a ghetto school in Boston, in part because he read Langston Hughes’ poem “Ballad of the Landlord” to his class:

Landlord, landlord,
My roof has sprung a leak.
Don’t you ’member I told you about it
Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,
These steps is broken down.
When you come up yourself
It’s a wonder you don’t fall down.

Ten bucks you say I owe you?
Ten bucks you say is due?
Well, that’s ten bucks more’n I’ll pay you
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?
You gonna cut off my heat?
You gonna take my furniture and
Throw it in the street?

Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.
Talk on—till you get through.
You ain’t gonna be able to say a word
If I land my fist on you.

Police! Police!
Come and get this man!
He’s trying to ruin the government
and overturn the land!

Copper’s whistle!
Patrol bell!
Arrest.

Precinct station.
Iron cell.
Headlines in press:

MAN THREATENS LANDLORD

TENANT HELD NO BAIL

JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS
IN COUNTY JAIL

Mr. Kozol said that he might have avoided some of the trouble that eventually led to his firing if he had chosen to “restrict his reading and reference materials to the list of approved publications”—poetry, for instance, to be read from officially approved selections called “Memory Gems.” He gave the Hughes audience a sample:

“Dare to be right! Dare to be true:
The failings of others can never save you.
Stand by your conscience, your honor, your
faith;
Stand like a hero, and battle till death.”

And another:

“There is beauty in the sunshine
An’ clouds that roam the sky;
There is beauty in the Heavens,
An’ the stars that shine on high.”

Later, Mr. Kozol read from a paper that had been handed in by one of his fourth-grade students after he had asked the class to write about the kinds of things *they* saw around them:

“In my school I see dirty boards and I see papers on the floor. I see an old browken window with a sign on it saying, Do not unlock this window are browken. And I see cracks in the walls and I see old books with ink poured all over them and I see old painting hanging on the walls. I see old alfurbet letter hanging on one nail on the wall. I see a dirty fire exit, I see a old closet with supplys for the class. I see pigons flying all over the school. I see old freight trains throgh the fence of the school yard. . . .”

The young teacher spoke at length about his experiences in this school, and then read a few paragraphs from a description of Africa in a book called “Our Neighbors Near and Far”:

“Yumbu and Minko are a black boy and a black girl who live in this jungle village. Their skins are of so dark a brown color that they look almost black. Their noses are large and flat. Their lips are thick. Their eyes are black and shining, and their hair is so curly that it seems like wool. They are Negroes and they belong to the black race.”

Two children in another area of the world were described this way:

“Two Swiss children live in a farmhouse on the edge of town. . . . These children are handsome. Their eyes are blue. Their hair is golden yellow. Their white skins are clear, and their cheeks are as red as ripe, red apples.”

Mr. Kozol said that he had never met Langston Hughes but that a short while after his much publicized firing he had received a new collection of Hughes’ “Simple” stories from the poet, with these words written on the flyleaf: “I wish the rent/Was heaven sent.”

Leon Bibb, in his turn, rose and thanked Mr. Hughes, whom he called Lang, first by reading the James Weldon Johnson poem “O Black and Unknown Bards” and then by giving a poignant rendering of Mr. Hughes’ poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and the spiritual “I’ve Been ’Buked and I’ve Been Scorned.” He wound up by saying, “Lang had the foresight to stand on his own words.”

Soon Hughes’ own words were being read by Miss Lindfors, who remained

seated, and whose Swedish accent was lost in translation as she read from “The Panther and the Lash,” a recent Hughes collection, brought out by Knopf. She read about the “Junior Addict”:

“... Yes. easier to get dope
than to get a job—
daytime or nighttime job,
teen-age, pre-draft,
pre-lifetime job.

“Quick, sunrise, come!
Sunrise out of Africa,
Quick, come!
Sunrise, please come!
Come! Come!”

And she read about the “Dream Deferred.” And she read “Impasse”:

“I could tell you,
If I wanted to,
What makes me
What I am.

“But I don’t
Really want to—
And you don’t
Give a damn.”

Miss Lindfors also read the poem whose first line is “That Justice is a blind goddess” and the poem about “Birmingham Sunday”—September 15, 1963, when four little Negro girls were killed in Sunday school by a bomb thrown from outside the church. Miss Lindfors read several more poems—some bitterly humorous ones, and the one that asks, “What color / Is the face / Of war?,” and one called “Peace,” and, finally, “Down Where I Am”:

“Too many years
Beatin’ at the door—
I done beat my
Both fists sore.

“Too many years
Tryin’ to get up there—
Done broke my ankles down,
Got nowhere.

“Too many years
Climbin’ that hill,
'Bout out of breath.
I got my fill.

“I’m gonna plant my feet
On solid ground.
If you want to see me,
Come down.”

The memorial to Langston Hughes ended as it had begun, with Langston Hughes’ low, bemused voice—this time telling about how he came from the Mid-

west to Columbia to go to school, and caused great consternation when he presented himself at Hartley Hall. That was in 1921, and no one of African descent, he says, had ever lived in a dormitory at Columbia. “There are many barriers people try to break down,” he told an audience (which had also been a Columbia audience) when the tape was made, in 1964. “I try to do it with poetry.”

—Charlayne Hunter-Gault

FEBRUARY 22, 1969 HEARING



In each of the past three years, the New York State Legislature has defeated proposals to liberalize the state’s eighty-six-year-old criminal-abortion statute, which permits an abortion only when the operation is necessary to preserve a pregnant woman’s life. Now a reform bill introduced by State Assemblyman Albert H. Blumenthal, of New York County, appears likely to pass. It would amend “life” to “health,” and give relief to women who are physically or mentally unequipped to care for a child or who risk bearing a deformed child, to victims of rape and incest, and to the very young. A second bill is also pending. Sponsored by Assemblywoman Constance Cook, of the 125th Assembly District, it would repeal the abortion law entirely and make abortion available on the same basis as any other medical treatment. The repeal bill has received little public attention. Newspapers that mention it at all tend to treat it as a quixotic oddity. Most people do not know that the Cook bill exists, and some legislators, when asked for their support, have professed not to have heard of it. A number of women’s organizations, however, are very much aware of the repeal proposal and are determined to spread the word. These groups are part of a revived—and increasingly militant—feminist movement. They include the National Organization for Women (NOW), the radical October Seventeenth Movement (a split-off from NOW), and Women’s Liberation, a collective label for radical feminist groups formed by women activists who found that men on the left too

often expected them to type, make coffee, and keep quiet. Whatever their ideological differences, feminists have united on the abortion issue. They oppose Blumenthal’s reforms—or any reforms—and demand total repeal. Abortion legislation, they assert, is class legislation, imposed on women by a male-supremacist society, and deprives women of control over their bodies. They argue that women should not have to petition doctors (mostly male) to grant them as a privilege what is really a fundamental right, and that only the pregnant woman herself can know whether she is physically and emotionally prepared to bear a child.

Last Thursday, the Joint Legislative Committee on the Problems of Public Health convened in the Public Health Building, at 125 Worth Street, to hear a panel of expert witnesses—doctors, lawyers, and clergymen selected for their knowledge of medical, legal, and social problems connected with abortion—who were to comment on the law and suggest modifications. About thirty women, including City Councilman Carol Greitzer, came to the hearings to demonstrate against reform and for repeal, against more hearings and for immediate action, and against the Committee’s concept of expertise. “The only real experts on abortion are women,” read a leaflet distributed by Women’s Liberation. “Women who have known the pain, fear, and socially imposed guilt of an illegal abortion. Women who have seen their friends dead or in agony from a post-abortion infection. Women who have had children by the wrong man, at the wrong time, because no doctor would help them.” The demonstrators, about half of them young women and half middle-aged housewives and professionals, picketed outside the building until the proceedings began, at 10 A.M. Then they filed into the hearing room. The eight members of the Joint Committee—all male—were lined up on a platform facing the audience. The chairman, State Senator Norman F. Lent, announced that the purpose of the meeting was not to hear public opinion but, rather, to hear testimony from “experts familiar with the psychological and sociological facts.” Of the fifteen witnesses listed on the agenda, fourteen were men; the lone woman was a nun.

The first witness, the chairman of the Governor’s commission on abortion

reform, began enumerating the commission's recommendations. Suddenly, a young, neatly dressed woman seated near the front stood up. "O.K., folks," she said. "Now it's time to hear from the real experts. I don't mean the public opinion you're so uninterested in. I mean concrete evidence from the people who really know—women. I can tell you the psychological and sociological effect the law has had on *me*—it's made me *angry*! It's made me think about things like forcing doctors to operate at gunpoint."

It took several minutes for Senator Lent to collect himself and try to restore order. By that time, several other women were on their feet, shouting.

"Where are the women on your panel?" one woman said.

"I had an abortion when I was seventeen. You don't know what that's like," another said. "Men don't get pregnant. Men don't rear children. They just make the laws," said a third.

Senator Lent began, "If you girls can organize yourselves and elect a spokesman—"

"We don't want a spokesman! We all want to testify!" a woman cried.

"But wait a minute, dear—" the Senator began.

"*Don't call me 'dear'!* Would you call a black person 'boy'?" the woman shouted.

The committee quickly adjourned the hearing and announced that there would be a closed executive session in an upstairs room.

Senator Seymour Thaler, who has been long associated with hospital reform, and who is himself a proponent of the Cook bill, was furious with the women. "What have you accomplished?" he called out. "There are people here who want to do something for you!"

"We're tired of being done for! We want to *do*, for a change!" one of the women replied.

Upstairs, police barred the door, and the women stood outside shouting, "We are the experts!" Women's Liberation sent in a formal request to testify, and the committee replied that two women might speak after the other witnesses had finished. The women were not satisfied ("It's a back-of-the-bus compromise!") "They just want to stall us till the newspapermen go home"), but half a dozen members of Women's Liberation decided to stick it out. All of them were under thirty, and half were married. Two had had il-

legal abortions; one had had a child and given it up for adoption; one had a friend who had nearly died because she hesitated to go to the hospital after a badly done seven-hundred-dollar operation.

As it turned out, the women waited for seven hours, sitting on the floor in the corridor, because the authorities, afraid of further disruption, would not let them into the hearing room. Finally, three women were permitted to speak. They talked about their experiences and demanded a public hearing that would be devoted entirely to the expert testimony of women.

The legislators would not agree to this. "Why do you assume we're against you?" one senator asked. "Four of the witnesses were for repeal. They said the same things you've been saying."

"There's a political problem you're overlooking," said the last of the women to speak. "In this society, there is an imbalance in power between men and women, just as there is between whites and blacks. You and your experts may have the right ideas, but you're still men talking to each other. We want to be consulted. Even if we accepted your definition of expert—and we don't—couldn't you find any female doctors or lawyers?"

"I agree with you about the law," Senator Thaler said. "But you're just acting out your personal pique against men."

"Not personal pique—*political grievance!*" the final speaker replied.

"All I can say," Senator Thaler declared, in conclusion, "is that you're the rudest bunch of people I've ever met."

The meeting broke up, and everyone began drifting out. "Well, we're probably the first women ever to talk about our abortions in public," one woman said. "That's something, anyway."

—Ellen Willis

APRIL 2, 2020

LORENA BORJAS



Lorena Borjas had a wheelie bag, and in the bag she had the world. The first time Lynly Egyes met her, Borjas pulled a birth certificate out of the bag. Egyes was then a lawyer with the

Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center and had recently taken the case of a young immigrant transgender woman who was in jail, facing felony assault charges for defending herself against an attacker—an exceedingly common predicament. "Lorena came into my office and said, 'I hear you need the birth certificate for one of the girls,'" Egyes told me on the phone. "I said, 'Who are you?' 'I am Lorena!'" Borjas also convinced Egyes to take on a second case that stemmed from the same incident; the proceedings dragged on for about a year, with frequent court appearances. Borjas always came to the hearings and brought supporters. "She felt it was important for the judge to see that these two young women were loved," Egyes said.

Borjas died on Monday, at Coney Island Hospital, in Brooklyn, of complications from COVID-19. She left an orphaned community of transgender women, especially Latina immigrant women in Queens, and countless L.G.B.T.-rights activists who looked to her for guidance, inspiration, and love. About two hundred and forty people gathered for a memorial on Monday night, albeit via Zoom, which added a layer of heartbreak to the mourning of a person whose legacy was one of building community, in the streets and in apartments in her Jackson Heights neighborhood, and of taking close, personal, physical care of people.

Borjas was born in Veracruz, Mexico, in 1960. At seventeen, she ran away to Mexico City, where she lived in the streets. At twenty, she crossed the border into the United States, where she hoped she would be able to receive hormone treatments. She made her way to New York City, where she studied for her G.E.D. and then studied accounting.

"Back then, the trans community didn't have spaces," Cristina Herrera, the C.E.O. and founder of the Translatinx Network, a group for transgender immigrants, told me on the phone. "We met at Port Authority—that was the main place, because you could stay indoors." Herrera, who is from El Salvador, came to New York in 1985, at the age of fifteen, and met Borjas soon after. "She was like the social worker in our community," Herrera said. "She was the case worker." Borjas guided other trans and gay immigrants to the resources she

had found: E.S.L. classes, G.E.D. tests, community colleges, H.I.V. screening, immigration lawyers, and research studies that paid for participation.

Borjas was able to obtain legal status under a Reagan-era amnesty. But, in the nineteen-nineties, she developed an addiction to crack, which, Herrera told me, led to more and riskier sex work and, finally, to a relationship in which Borjas was trafficked. She was arrested several times, making her ineligible to renew her green card or apply for naturalization.

In the late nineteen-nineties, Borjas escaped from her abuser. She got clean. Then she got to work helping people who hadn't been as lucky. "In the morning, she would get up and go to the Department of Health and take free condoms there," Egyes told me. "Then she might also go to a food pantry. And at night she would walk around with her wheelie bag, distributing the condoms and the food."

One of Borjas's closest friends, Cecilia Gentili, who is forty-eight, told me that she met Borjas in a bar in Jackson Heights, in 2005. Gentili, who had come from Argentina five years earlier, was undocumented then and doing sex work. A couple of years later, Gentili got a job at Apicha, a clinic for the L.G.B.T. community, and asked Borjas to help her reach out to potential clients. "She said, 'Come with me to hand out condoms,'" Gentili said. "We started at 11 P.M., up and down Roosevelt Avenue. She said, 'When you give out condoms, you can give out referrals to your clinic.'" They walked the streets until three or four in the morning. At the time, New York police often used possession of condoms as evidence in prostitution cases, and word on the street was that one shouldn't carry more than three at a time. So Borjas considered it her duty to replenish sex workers' supplies of condoms, a couple at a time, all night long. "She showed people that they had family," Egyes said of Borjas's condom-distribution work.

Chase Strangio, the deputy director of the L.G.B.T. and H.I.V. Project at the American Civil Liberties Union, met Borjas more than ten years ago, when Strangio was working at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. Borjas worked to educate him about patterns of arrests of transgender women of color. "She was so connected to the community that

when someone would get arrested, the first phone call was to Lorena," Strangio said. In 2012, together the two founded the Lorena Borjas Community Fund, which gives bail and bond assistance to transgender immigrants in criminal and immigration proceedings. This was the kind of specific need Borjas's knowledge of the community could help identify. At the time, the Obama Administration was increasing pressure on local police to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement; when immigrants ended up behind bars—for whatever reason—they faced the risk of deportation, and so it was essential to get them out fast.

Even while Borjas was advocating on behalf of transgender immigrants, she was at risk for being deported herself. A



Lorena Borjas

couple of years into the friendship, Borjas finally asked Egyes to look at her own case. Egyes joined the effort to vacate her convictions—it worked with some but not all of them—and eventually filed a petition for a pardon. In her letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo, Egyes described some of the work that Borjas had done. "At meeting after meeting with law enforcement, many clients explained how Lorena was the reason that they were able to escape their trafficker," Egyes wrote. "At one point, former Assistant United States Attorney, [name redacted], asked if Lorena was a real person because she seemed to help so many people but wasn't affiliated with any organization. I explained that Lorena is in

fact real and that she helps people because she too was a victim and wanted to ensure that these girls had a way out of bad situations." Egyes attached a list of more than twenty awards, certificates, and proclamations Borjas had received in recognition of her activism. Governor Cuomo pardoned Borjas in 2017.

Borjas was not paid for most of her work. She cobbled together a living: she was paid for some talks, outreach, and counselling sessions, and sometimes she cleaned houses. "She made the money stretch," Egyes said. "She gave me hope that people do good things because they are good people, not because they would get anything for it."

"None of her work was with a 'rescuing' mentality," Gentili said. "It was, We help because we help each other. She was the mother of the trans Latinx community."

Strangio recalled that, in 2011, Borjas threw a big party for him, complete with a cake. It wasn't his birthday or a date of any other significance. When Strangio asked what the party was for, Borjas answered that it was a way of giving thanks. "She celebrated people," he said. A year later, when Strangio and his then partner were expecting a baby, Borjas threw them a baby shower. "She raised money and got us a stroller and a car seat," Strangio told me. "I mean, we are lawyers! But, no, 'You are going to have a child, and we are going to take care of you. That's what we do.'"

Last year, Borjas became a U.S. citizen. Her work had inspired several nonprofits, including the one that Herrera runs. "She was starting to see the fruits of her labor," Herrera said. And Borjas herself was finally safe. "She had made it through the AIDS epidemic!" Herrera exclaimed. "She made it through the crack epidemic! She made it through the violence we faced in the nineties and two-thousands, with immigration! I thought we were going to have her until she was in her seventies or eighties."

There is a particular gut punch that coronavirus deaths pack for people who saw their generation decimated by AIDS. "When we met, we had a community of fourteen," Herrera said. "Recently, there were three of us left, two H.I.V.-positive and one negative." Borjas was positive. "And now there are only two of us left."

—*Masha Gessen*

PLANE TO MISSISSIPPI

An encounter with Martin Luther King, Jr.

BY CALVIN TRILLIN

I happened to fly from Atlanta to Jackson on the same plane as Martin Luther King, who was about to begin his tour of Mississippi with some speeches and meetings in Greenwood. He was accompanied by four of his aides in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—Andrew Young, C. T. Vivian, Bernard Lee, and Dorothy Cotton—and except that all of them are Negroes and that the men were wearing buttons in their lapels that said, “S.C.L.C. Freedom Now,” the group might have been thought to consist of a corporation executive off to make a sales-conference speech accompanied by efficient, neatly dressed young assistants brought along to handle arrangements and take care of the paperwork. As the plane left Atlanta, Young began going through a number of file folders, making notes on a legal-sized yellow pad and occasionally passing them up to King, who paused in his reading of the *Times* and the news magazines now and then to consult with Young or Mrs. Cotton. Lee opened “The Souls of Black Folk,” by W. E. B. DuBois, and Mrs. Cotton brought out a copy of “Southern Politics,” by V. O. Key, which she read when she wasn’t talking with King. Across the aisle from King, there happened to be sitting a stocky, nice-looking young white man with a short haircut and wearing Ivy League clothes. He looked as if he might have been a responsible member of a highly regarded college fraternity six or eight years ago and was now an equally responsible member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce

of a Southern city that prided itself on its progress. About halfway between Atlanta and Montgomery, the plane’s first stop, he leaned across the aisle and politely said to King, in a thick drawl, “Excuse me. I heard them calling you Dr. King. Are you Martin Luther King?”

“Yes, I am,” said King, just as politely. “I wonder if I could ask you two ques-



tions,” the young man said, and Young, Vivian, and Lee, all of whom were sitting behind King, leaned forward to hear the conversation. “I happen to be a Southerner, but I also happen to consider myself a Christian. I wonder, do you feel you’re teaching Christian love?”

“Yes, that’s my basic approach,” King said. “I think love is the most durable element in the world, and my whole approach is based on that.”

“Do you think the people you preach to have a feeling of love?” the young man asked.

“Well, I’m not talking about weak love,” King explained. “I’m talking about love with justice. Weak love can be sentimental and empty. I’m talking about the love that is strong, so that you love your fellow-men enough to lead them to justice.”

“Do you think that’s the same love Jesus taught?” the young man asked.

“Yes, I do.”

“Even though you incite one man against another?”

“You have to remember that Christ was crucified by people who were against him,” said King, still in a polite, careful tone. “Do you think there’s love in the South now? Do you think white people in the South love Negroes?”

“I anticipated that,” said the young man. “There hasn’t always been love. I admit we’ve made some mistakes.”

“Uh-huh. Well, let me tell you some of the things that have happened to us. We were slaves for two hundred and fifty years. We endured one hundred years of segregation. We have been brutalized and lynched. Can’t you understand that the Negro is bound to have some resentment? But I preach that despite this resentment we should organize militantly but non-violently. If we organize non-violently, we can show the injustice. I don’t think you’d be talking to me now if we hadn’t had some success in making people face the issue.”

“I happen to be a Christian,” the young man repeated.

“Do you think segregation is Christian?” asked King.

“I was anticipating that,” the young man said. “I don’t have any flat answer. I’m questioning your methods as causing more harm than good.”

“Uh-huh. Well, what do you suggest we need?” King was able to say “Uh-huh” in a way that implied he had registered

a remark for what it was worth and decided not to bring up its more obvious weaknesses, but he and the young man did seem genuinely interested in each other's views.

"I think we need respect and good will," said the young man.

"How do you propose to get that?" King asked.

The young man hesitated for a moment and then said, "I don't know. I just don't agree that it does any good to incite people. I know there's resentment, and you're able to capitalize on this resentment and create friction and incite discord. And you know this."

"I don't think we're inciting discord but exposing discord," King said.

"Well, let me ask you this," said the young man. "Are you concerned that certain people—well, let's come out with political labels—that this plays into the hands of the Communists?"

"I think segregation and discrimination play into the hands of the Communists much more than the efforts to end them," said King.

"But it's certainly been playing into the Communists' hands since you and the others—as you put it—started exposing what was there. There's certainly more attention given to it."

"Don't you think that if we don't solve this the Communists will have more to gain?"

"I think much more progress was made between the two races before the last few years, when you and other people started inciting trouble between the two races."

"What is this progress?" asked King. "Where was the lunch-counter desegregation? Where was the civil-rights law?"

"In good relations," the young man answered.

"Good white relations," interrupted Vivian, who apparently felt unable to keep out of the argument any longer.

"Well, I just wanted to ask those questions," said the young man. He seemed ready to end the discussion.

"Uh-huh," said King. "Well, I'd like to be loved by everyone, but we can't always wait for love. Maybe you ought to read my writings. I've done quite a bit of writing on non-violence."

"Well, I think you are causing violence," the young man said.

"Would you condemn the robbed man for possessing the money to be robbed?"

asked King. "Would you condemn Christ for having a commitment to truth that drove men to crucify him? Would you condemn Socrates for having the views that forced the hemlock on him? Society must condemn the robber, not the man he robs."

"I don't want to discuss our philosophical differences," said the young man. "I just wanted to ask you those questions."

"Uh-huh. Well, I'm sorry you don't think I'm a Christian."

"I didn't say that."

"Well, I'm sorry that you don't think that what I preach is Christian, and I'm sorry you don't think segregation is un-Christian."

King turned back to his paper for a few moments, as if the conversation had ended—without progress but with no animosity—and then he looked up and said to the young man, "What do you think of the new civil-rights law? Do you think that's a good law?"

"Well, I haven't read it, but I think parts of it just carry on the trend toward federal dictatorship."

"You sound like a good Goldwaterite," said King, with a slight smile. "Are you going to vote for Goldwater?"

"Yes, I expect I will," the young man said.

"It's too bad you're going to back a loser, because I'm afraid we're going to hand him a decisive defeat in November." King's tone was light; he might have been joking with a long-time neighbor who had always been a member of the opposing political party.

"I've voted for losers before," said the young man.

King turned back to his reading, and Vivian said, "What do you mean by federal dictatorship?"

The white man didn't seem anxious to take on a fresh adversary, but he replied, "I think everything should be done at the lowest level of government."

"How about all the federal hospitals? The roads?" said Vivian. "You say you want the federal government to stay out of everything unless it has to do it. That's why you have those hospitals and roads in Georgia, because Georgia was too poor to pay for them. Do you know how much more Mississippi takes from the federal government per person than it puts in? You didn't start talking about federal dictatorship until it came to race—"

"Are you asking me a question or making a speech?" said the young man.

"Both," Vivian said.

King looked up from his paper and smiled across at the young man. "We're all preachers, you see," he explained, and then turned to discuss something with Mrs. Cotton as the young man was making a point to Vivian.

"You must be talking about Toynbee's book," said Vivian, and he launched into a rapid-fire series of questions about Toynbee's theories on race.

"There's no need to debate this," the young man said finally, and he began to look out the window. At Montgomery, he walked off the plane.

"What do you think of that?" King asked, shaking his head, as the white man left. "Such a young man, too. Those are the people who are rallying to Goldwater. You can't get to him. His mind has been cold so long there's nothing that can get to him."

The young man returned to the plane before it left Montgomery, but, with a quick, embarrassed smile, he walked past King and the others and settled in a rear seat.

Lunch was served between Montgomery and Meridian, and afterward Lee went to sleep and Young crossed the aisle to talk with Vivian about arrangements for that night. "I called the Justice Department today, and they said they think we should go back to Jackson after the meeting," he said.

"I don't like to have Dr. King on the road at night," Vivian replied.

"Apparently, Greenwood is the kind of place now where a mob might form," said Young. "They came right into the Negro neighborhood a few months ago to get the kids at the S.N.C.C. office."

"I never know if the Justice Department knows something it's not telling us," said Vivian. "But I hate to be on the road."

"Even with a state-patrol escort?"

"That state patrol isn't a patrol," Vivian said.

"I hear they were pretty good with the congressmen who went down there," said Young.

"Well, maybe so."

"Well, let's see what the mood is when we get there," Young said in conclusion. He walked across the aisle, lowered the back of his seat, and soon went to sleep. In front of him, King was engrossed in a news magazine. ♦

THE MATTER OF BLACK LIVES

A new kind of movement found its moment. What will its future be?

BY JELANI COBB



On February 18th, as part of the official recognition of Black History Month, President Obama met with a group of African-American leaders at the White House to discuss civil-rights issues. The guests—who included Representative John Lewis, of Georgia; Sherrilyn Ifill, the director-counsel of the N.A.A.C.P. Legal Defense and Educational Fund; and Wade Henderson, who heads the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights—were intent on pressing the President to act decisively on criminal-justice issues during his last year in office. Their urgency, though, was tempered by a degree of sentimentality, verging on

nostalgia. As Ifill later told me, “We were very much aware that this was the last Black History Month of this Presidency.”

But the meeting was also billed as the “first of its kind,” in that it would bring together different generations of activists. To that end, the White House had invited DeRay Mckesson, Brittany Packnett, and Aislinn Pulley, all of whom are prominent figures in Black Lives Matter, which had come into existence—amid the flash points of the George Zimmerman trial; Michael Brown’s death, in Ferguson, Missouri; and the massacre at the Emanuel A.M.E. Church, in Charleston,

South Carolina—during Obama’s second term.

Black Lives Matter has been described as “not your grandfather’s civil-rights movement,” to distinguish its tactics and its philosophy from those of nineteen-sixties-style activism. Like the Occupy movement, it eschews hierarchy and centralized leadership, and its members have not infrequently been at odds with older civil-rights leaders and with the Obama Administration—as well as with one another. So it wasn’t entirely surprising when Pulley, a community organizer in Chicago, declined the White House invitation, on the ground that the meeting was nothing more than a “photo opportunity” for the President. She posted a statement online in which she said that she “could not, with any integrity, participate in such a sham that would only serve to legitimize the false narrative that the government is working to end police brutality and the institutional racism that fuels it.” Her skepticism was attributable, in part, to the fact that she lives and works in a city whose mayor, Rahm Emanuel, Obama’s former chief of staff, is embroiled in a controversy stemming from a yearlong coverup of the fatal shooting by police of an African-American teen-ager.

Mckesson, a full-time activist, and Packnett, the executive director of Teach for America in St. Louis, did accept the invitation, and they later described the meeting as constructive. Mckesson tweeted: “Why did I go to the mtg w/ @POTUS today? B/c there are things we can do now to make folks’ lives better today, tomorrow, & the day after.” Two weeks earlier, Mckesson had announced that he would be a candidate in the Baltimore mayoral race, and Obama’s praise, after the meeting, for his “outstanding work mobilizing in Baltimore” was, if not an endorsement, certainly politically valuable.

That split in the response to the White House, however, reflected a larger conflict: while Black Lives Matter’s insistent outsider status has allowed it to shape the dialogue surrounding race and criminal justice in this country, it has also sparked a debate about the limits of protest, particularly of online activism. Meanwhile, internal disputes have raised questions

Alicia Garza, a labor organizer in Oakland, espouses a type of ecumenical activism.

about what the movement hopes to achieve, and about its prospects for success.

The phrase “black lives matter” was born in July of 2013, in a Facebook post by Alicia Garza, called “a love letter to black people.” The post was intended as an affirmation for a community distraught over George Zimmerman’s acquittal in the shooting death of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin, in Sanford, Florida. Garza, now thirty-five, is the special-projects director in the Oakland office of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, which represents twenty thousand caregivers and housekeepers, and lobbies for labor legislation on their behalf. She is also an advocate for queer and transgender rights and for anti-police-brutality campaigns.

Garza has a prodigious social-media presence, and on the day that the Zimmerman verdict was handed down she posted, “the sad part is, there’s a section of America who is cheering and celebrating right now. and that makes me sick to my stomach. we GOTTA get it together y’all.” Later, she added, “btw stop saying we are not surprised. that’s a damn shame in itself. I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter. And I will continue that. stop giving up on black life.” She ended with “black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.”

Garza’s friend Patrisse Cullors amended the last three words to create a hashtag: #BlackLivesMatter. Garza sometimes writes haiku—she admires the economy of the form—and in those four syllables she recognized a distillation not only of the anger that attended Zimmerman’s acquittal but also of the animating principle at the core of black social movements dating back more than a century.

Garza grew up as Alicia Schwartz, in Marin County, where she was raised by her African-American mother and her Jewish stepfather, who run an antiques store. Her brother Joey, who works for the family business, is almost young enough to have been Trayvon Martin’s peer. That is one reason, she says, that the Zimmerman verdict affected her so deeply. The family was not particularly political, but Garza showed an interest in activism in middle school, when she

worked to have information about contraception made available to students in Bay Area schools.

She went on to study anthropology and sociology at the University of California, San Diego. When she was twenty-three, she told her family that she was queer. They reacted to the news with equanimity. “I think it helped that my parents are an interracial couple,” she told me. “Even if they didn’t fully understand what it meant, they were supportive.” For a few years, Garza held various jobs in the social-justice sector. She found the work fulfilling, but, she said, “San Francisco broke my heart over and over. White progressives would actually argue with us about their right to determine what was best for communities they never had to live in.”

In 2003, she met Malachi Garza, a gregarious, twenty-four-year-old trans male activist, who ran training sessions for organizers. They married five years later. In 2009, early on the morning of New Year’s Day, a transit-police officer named Johannes Mehserle fatally shot Oscar Grant, a twenty-two-year-old African-American man, in the Fruitvale BART station, in Oakland, three blocks from where the Garzas live. Alicia was involved in a fight for fair housing in San Francisco at the time, but Malachi, who was by then the director of the Community Justice Network for Youth, immersed himself in a campaign to have Mehserle brought up on murder charges. (He was eventually convicted of involuntary manslaughter, and served one year of a two-year sentence.)

Grant died nineteen days before Barack Obama’s first Inauguration. (The film “Fruitvale Station,” a dramatic recounting of the last day of Grant’s life, contrasts his death with the national exuberance following the election.) His killing was widely seen as a kind of political counterpoint—a reminder that the grip of history would not be easily broken.

Garza had met Patrisse Cullors in 2005, on a dance floor in Providence, Rhode Island, where they were both attending an organizers’ conference. Cullors, a native of Los Angeles, had been organizing in the L.G.B.T.Q. community since she was a teen-ager—

she came out as queer when she was sixteen and was forced to leave home—and she had earned a degree in religion and philosophy at U.C.L.A. She is now a special-projects director at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, in Oakland, which focusses on social justice in inner cities. Garza calls Cullors her “twin.” After Cullors created the Black Lives Matter hashtag, the two women began promoting it. Opal Tometi, a writer and an immigration-rights organizer in Brooklyn, whom Garza had met at a conference in 2012, offered to build a social-media platform, on Facebook and Twitter, where activists could connect with one another. The women also began thinking about how to turn the phrase into a movement.

Black Lives Matter didn’t reach a wider public until the following summer, when a police officer named Darren Wilson shot and killed eighteen-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson. Darnell Moore, a writer and an activist based in Brooklyn, who knew Cullors, coordinated “freedom rides” to Missouri from New York, Chicago, Portland, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Boston. Within a few weeks of Brown’s death, hundreds of people who had never participated in organized protests took to the streets, and that campaign eventually exposed Ferguson as a case study of structural racism in America and a metaphor for all that had gone wrong since the end of the civil-rights movement.

DeRay Mckesson, who was twenty-nine at the time and working as an administrator in the Minneapolis public-school system, watched as responses to Brown’s death rolled through his Twitter feed, and decided to drive the six hundred miles to Ferguson to witness the scene himself. Before he left, he posted a request for housing on Facebook. Teach for America’s Brittany Packnett helped him find a place; before moving to Minneapolis, he had taught sixth-grade math as a T.F.A. employee in Brooklyn. Soon after his arrival, he attended a street-medical training session, where he met Johnetta Elzie, a twenty-five-year-old St. Louis native. With Packnett, they began sharing information about events and tweeting updates from demonstrations, and they quickly

became the most recognizable figures associated with the movement in Ferguson. For their efforts, he and Elzie received the Howard Zinn Freedom to Write Award, in 2015, and Packnett was appointed to the President's Commission on Twenty-first Century Policing.

Yet, although the three of them are among the most identifiable names associated with the Black Lives Matter movement, none of them officially belong to a chapter of the organization. Elzie, in fact, takes issue with people referring to Garza, Cullors, and Tometi as founders. As she sees it, Ferguson is the cradle of the movement, and no chapter of the organization exists there or anywhere in the greater St. Louis area. That contentious distinction between the organization and the movement is part of the debate about what Black Lives Matter is and where it will go next.

The central contradiction of the civil-rights movement was that it was a quest for democracy led by organizations that frequently failed to function democratically. W. E. B. Du Bois, in his 1903 essay "The Talented Tenth," wrote that "the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men," and the traditional narrative of the battle for the rights of African-Americans has tended to read like a great-black-man theory of history. But, starting a generation ago, civil-rights historians concluded that their field had focussed too heavily on the movement's leaders. New scholarship began charting the contributions of women, local activists, and small organizations—the lesser-known elements that enabled the grand moments we associate with the civil-rights era. In particular, the career of Ella Baker, who was a director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and who oversaw the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, came to be seen as a counter-model to the careers of leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. Baker was emphatically averse to the spotlight. Barbara Ransby, a professor of history and gender studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, who wrote a biography of Baker, told me that, during the nineteen-forties, when Baker was a director of branches for the N.A.A.C.P.,

"she would go into small towns and say, 'Whom are you reaching out to?' And she'd tell them that if you're not reaching out to the town drunk you're not really working for the rights of black people. The folk who were getting rounded up and thrown in jail had to be included."

Cullors says, "The consequence of focussing on a leader is that you develop a necessity for that leader to be the one who's the spokesperson and the organizer, who tells the masses where to go, rather than the masses understanding that we can catalyze a movement in our own community." Or, as Garza put it, "The model of the black preacher leading people to the promised land isn't working right now." Jesse Jackson—a former aide to King and a two-time Presidential candidate, who won seven primaries and four caucuses in 1988—was booed when he tried to address young protesters in Ferguson, who saw him as an interloper. That response was seen as indicative of a generational divide. But the divide was as much philosophical as it was generational, and one that was visible half a century earlier.

Garza, Cullors, and Tometi advocate a horizontal ethic of organizing, which favors democratic inclusion at the grassroots level. Black Lives Matter emerged as a modern extension of Ella Baker's thinking—a preference for ten thousand candles rather than a single spotlight. In a way, they created the context and the movement created itself. "Really, the genesis of the organization was the people who organized in their cities for the ride to Ferguson," Garza told me in her office. Those people, she said, "pushed us to create a chapter structure. They wanted to continue to do this work together, and be connected to activists and organizers from across the country." There are now more than thirty Black Lives Matter chapters in the United States, and one in Toronto. They vary in structure and emphasis, and operate with a great deal of latitude, particularly when it comes to choosing what "actions" to stage. But prospective chapters must submit to a rigorous assessment, by a coordinator, of the kinds of activism that members have previously engaged in, and they must commit to the organization's guid-

ing principles. These are laid out in a thirteen-point statement written by the women and Darnell Moore, which calls for, in part, an ideal of unapologetic blackness. "In affirming that black lives matter, we need not qualify our position," the statement reads.

Yet, although the movement initially addressed the killing of unarmed young black men, the women were equally committed to the rights of working people and to gender and sexual equality. So the statement also espouses inclusivity, because "to love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a necessary prerequisite for wanting the same for others." Garza's argument for inclusivity is informed by the fact that she—a black queer female married to a trans male—would likely have found herself marginalized not only in the society she hopes to change but also in many of the organizations that are dedicated to changing it. She also dismisses the kind of liberalism that finds honor in nonchalance. "We want to make sure that people are not saying, 'Well, whatever you are, I don't care,'" she said. "No, I want you to care. I want you to see all of me."

Black activists have organized in response to police brutality for decades, but part of the reason for the visibility of the current movement is the fact that such problems have persisted—and, from the public's perspective, at least, have seemed to escalate—during the first African-American Presidency. Obama's election was seen as the culmination of years of grassroots activism that built the political power of black Americans, but the naïve dream of a post-racial nation foundered even before he was sworn into office. As Garza put it, "Conditions have shifted, so our institutions have shifted to meet those conditions. Barack Obama comes out after Trayvon is murdered and does this weird, half-ass thing where he's, like, 'That could've been my son,' and at the same time he starts scolding young black men." In short, all this would seem to suggest, until there was a black Presidency it was impossible to conceive of the limitations of one. Obama, as a young community organizer in Chicago, determined that he could bring about change more effectively through electoral politics; Garza is of a genera-

tion of activists who have surveyed the circumstances of his Presidency and drawn the opposite conclusion.

I met up with Garza in downtown San Francisco last August, on an afternoon when the icy winds felt like a rebuke to summer. A lively crowd of several hundred people had gathered in United Nations Plaza for Trans Liberation Tuesday, an event that was being held in twenty cities across the country. A transgender opera singer sang “Amazing Grace.” Then Janetta Johnson, a black trans activist, said, “We’ve been in the street for Oscar Grant, for Trayvon Martin, for Eric Garner. It’s time for our community to show up for trans women.”

The names of Grant, Martin, and Garner—who died in 2014, after being put in a choke hold by police on Staten Island—are now part of the canon of the wrongfully dead. The point of Trans Liberation Tuesday was to draw attention to the fact that there are others, such as Ashton O’Hara and Amber Monroe, black trans people who were killed just weeks apart in Detroit last year, whose names may not be known to the public but who are no less emblematic of a broader social concern. According to a report by the Human Rights Campaign, between 2013 and 2015 there were fifty-three known murders of transgender people; thirty-nine of the victims were African-American.

Garza addressed the crowd for just four minutes; she is not given to soaring rhetoric, but speaks with clarity and confidence. She began with a roll call of the underrepresented: “We understand that, in our communities, black trans folk, gender-nonconforming folk, black queer folk, black women, black disabled folk—we have been leading movements for a long time, but we have been erased from the official narrative.” Yet, over all, her comments were more concerned with the internal dynamics of race. For Garza, the assurance that black lives matter is as much a reminder directed at black people as it is a revelation aimed at whites. The message of Trans Liberation Tuesday was that, as society at large has devalued black lives, the African-American community is guilty of devaluing lives based on gender and sexuality.



“Eric’s calling from camp again.”

The kind of ecumenical activism that Garza espouses has deep roots in the Bay Area. In 1966, in Oakland, Huey P. Newton co-founded the Black Panther Party, which was practically defined by hyperbolic masculinity. Four years later, he made a statement whose message was, at the time, rare for the left, not to mention the broader culture. In a Party newsletter, he wrote:

We have not said much about the homosexual at all, but we must relate to the homosexual movement because it is a real thing. And I know through reading, and through my life experience and observations, that homosexuals are not given freedom and liberty by anyone in the society. They might be the most oppressed people in the society.

The movement remained steadfastly masculinist, but by the nineteen-eighties Newton’s words had begun to appear prescient. When I asked Garza about the most common misperception of Black Lives Matter, she pointed to a frequent social-media dig that it is “a gay movement masquerading as a black one.” But the organization’s fundamental point has been to challenge the assumption that those two things are mutually exclusive. In 1989, the race-theory

and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the principle of “intersectionality,” by which multiple identities coexist and complicate the ways in which we typically think of class, race, gender, and sexuality as social problems. “Our work is heavily influenced by Crenshaw’s theory,” Garza told me. “People think that we’re engaged with identity politics. The truth is that we’re doing what the labor movement has always done—organizing people who are at the bottom.”

As was the case during the civil-rights movement, there are no neat distinctions between the activities of formal organizations and those incited by an atmosphere of social unrest. That ambiguity can be an asset when it inspires entry-level activism among people who had never attended a protest, as happened in Ferguson. But it can be a serious liability when actions contrary to the principles of the movement are associated with it. In December, 2014, video surfaced of a march in New York City, called in response to the deaths of Eric Garner and others, where some protesters chanted that they

wanted to see “dead cops.” The event was part of the Millions March, which was led by a coalition of organizations, but the chant was attributed to Black Lives Matter. Several months later, the footage provoked controversy. “For four weeks, Bill O’Reilly was flashing my picture on the screen and saying we’re a hate group,” Garza said.

A week after the march, a troubled drifter named Ismaaiyl Brinsley fatally shot two New York City police officers, Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu, as they sat in their patrol car, before killing himself. Some observers argued that, although Brinsley had not identified with any group, his actions were the result of an anti-police climate created by Black Lives Matter. Last summer, not long after Dylann Roof killed nine African-Americans at the Emanuel A.M.E. Church, South Carolina’s governor, Nikki Haley, implied that the movement had so intimidated police officers that they were unable to do their jobs, thereby putting more black lives at risk. All of this was accompanied by an increasing skepticism, across the political spectrum, about whether Black Lives Matter could move beyond reacting to outrages and begin proactively shaping public policy.

The current Presidential campaign has presented the movement with a crucial opportunity to address that question. Last summer, at the annual Netroots Nation conference of progressive activists, in Phoenix, Martin O’Malley made his candidacy a slightly longer shot when he responded to a comment about Black Lives Matter by asserting that all lives matter—an evasion of the specificity of black concerns, which elicited a chorus of boos. At the same event, activists interrupted Bernie Sanders. The Sanders campaign made overtures to the movement following the incident, but three weeks later, on the eve of the first anniversary of Michael Brown’s death, two protesters identifying themselves as Black Lives Matter activists—Marissa Johnson and Mara Willaford—disrupted a Sanders rally in Seattle, preventing the Senator from addressing several thousand people who had gathered to hear him. The women were booed by the largely white crowd, but the dissent wasn’t limited to whites. This was the

kind of freestyle disruption that caused even some African-Americans to wonder how the movement was choosing its targets. At the time, it did seem odd to have gone after Sanders twice, given that he is the most progressive candidate in the race, and that none of the Republican candidates had been disrupted in their campaigns.

Garza argues that the strategy has been to leverage influence among the Democrats, since ninety per cent of African-Americans vote Democratic. She says that it will be uncomfortable for voters if “the person that you are supporting hasn’t actually done what they need to be doing, in terms of addressing the real concern of people under this broad banner.” She defended the Seattle action, saying that it was “part of a very localized dynamic, but an important one,” and added that “without being disrupted Sanders wouldn’t have released a platform on racial justice.” Afterward, Sanders hired Symone Sanders, an African-American woman, to be his national press secretary. He also released a statement on civil rights that prominently featured the names of African-American victims of police violence, and he began frequently referring to Black Lives Matter on the campaign trail. He subsequently won the support of many younger black activists, including Eric Garner’s daughter.

An attempt to disrupt a Hillary Clinton rally early in the campaign, in New



Hampshire, failed when the protesters arrived too late to get into the hall. But Clinton met with them privately afterward, and engaged in a debate about mass incarceration. She has met with members of the movement on other occasions, too. Clinton has the support of older generations of black leaders and activists—including Eric Garner’s mother—and she decisively carried the black vote in Super Tuesday primaries across the South. But she has been re-

peatedly criticized by other activists for her support of President Bill Clinton’s 1994 crime bill, and, particularly, for comments that she made, in the nineties, about “superpredators” and the need “to bring them to heel.” Two weeks ago, Ashley Williams, a twenty-three-year-old who describes herself as an “independent organizer for the movement for black lives,” interrupted a private fund-raising event in Charleston, where Clinton was speaking, to demand an apology. The next day, Clinton told the *Washington Post*, “Looking back, I shouldn’t have used those words, and I wouldn’t use them today.”

If Black Lives Matter has been an object lesson in the power of social media, it has also revealed the medium’s pitfalls. Just as the movement was enjoying newfound influence among the Democratic Presidential contenders, it was also gaining attention for a series of febrile Twitter exchanges. In one, DeRay Mckesson and Johnetta Elzie got into a dispute with Shaun King, a writer for the *Daily News*, over fund-raising for a social-justice group. The conservative Web site Breitbart ran a picture of Mckesson and King with the headline “BLACK LIVES MATTER LEADERS JUST EXCOMMUNICATED SHAUN KING.”

Last month, it was announced that Garza would speak at Webster University, in St. Louis, which prompted an acrimonious social-media response from people in the area who are caught up in the debate over the movement’s origins. Elzie tweeted, “Thousands of ppl without platforms who have NO CLUE who the ‘three’ are, and their work/sacrifice gets erased,” and said that the idea that Garza is a founder of the movement is a “lie.” Garza released a statement saying that she had cancelled the event “due to threats and online attacks on our organization and us as individuals from local activists with whom we have made an effort to have meaningful dialogue.” She continued, “We all lose when bullying and personal attacks become a substitute for genuine conversation and principled disagreement.”

There’s nothing novel about personality conflicts arising among activists, but to older organizers, who had watched

as federal surveillance and infiltration programs sowed discord that all but wrecked the Black Power movement, the public airing of grievances seemed particularly amateurish. “Movements are destroyed by conflicts over money, power, and credit,” Garza said, a week after the cancellation. “We have to take seriously the impact of not being able to have principled disagreement, or we’re not going to be around very long.”

Almost from the outset, Black Lives Matter has been compared to the Occupy movement. Occupy was similarly associated with a single issue—income inequality—which it transformed into a movement through social media. Its focus on the one per cent played a key role in the 2012 election, and it likely contributed to the unexpected support for Bernie Sanders’s campaign. To the movement’s critics, however, its achievements fell short of its promise. Its dissipation seemed to prove that, while the Internet can foster the creation of a new movement, it can just as easily threaten its survival.

Black Lives Matter would appear to face similar concerns, though in recent months the movement has tacked in new directions. In November, the Ella Baker Center received a five-hundred-thousand-dollar grant from Google, for Patrisse Cullors to further develop a program to help California residents monitor and respond to acts of police violence. Last year, Mckesson, with Elzie, Brittany Packnett, and Samuel Sinyangwe, a twenty-five-year-old data analyst with a degree from Stanford, launched Campaign Zero, a list of policing-policy recommendations that calls for, among other things, curtailing arrests for low-level crimes, reducing quotas for summonses and arrests, and demilitarizing police departments. To date, neither Clinton nor Sanders has endorsed the platform, but both have met with the activists to discuss it.

The announcement of Mckesson’s mayoral candidacy, which he made on Twitter—he has more than three hundred thousand followers—is the most dramatic break from the movement’s previous actions. (Beyoncé has more than fourteen million followers, but she follows only ten people. Mckesson is one of them.) Mckesson is a native of

Baltimore and he grew up on the same side of town as Freddie Gray, whose death last year in police custody sparked protests and riots in the city—at which Mckesson was a frequent presence. His family struggled with poverty and drug addiction, but he excelled academically and went on to attend Bowdoin College, in Maine. He will be running against twenty-eight other candidates. One of them, the city councilman Nick Mosby, is married to Marilyn Mosby, the Maryland state’s attorney, who is handling the prosecution of the six police officers indicted in connection with Gray’s death.

In Baltimore, Mckesson told me that he is using his savings to fund his activist work. “It’s totally possible to have Beyoncé follow you on Twitter and still be broke,” he said. (BuzzFeed reported that a former Citibank executive would host an event at his New York City home to raise funds for Mckesson’s campaign.) He wouldn’t discuss his candidacy’s implications for the movement, but he is very serious about running. Two weeks ago, he released a twenty-six-page report detailing his platform for reforming the city’s schools, police department, and economic infrastructure. He has already been attacked for his connection to Teach for America; after he released his plan for improving Baltimore’s schools, it was dismissed as a corporatist undertaking along the lines of Michael Bloomberg’s and Rahm Emanuel’s reforms. He rejects the idea that his lack of experience in elected office should be an obstacle. When I asked how he thought he would be able to get members of the city council and the state legislature to support his ideas, he said, “I think we build relationships. That question seems to come from a place of traditional reading of politics. That says, ‘If you don’t know people already, then you cannot be successful.’ Politics as usual actually hasn’t turned into a change in outcomes here.”

Garza is tactful when she talks about Mckesson’s campaign. “I’m in favor of people getting in where they fit in. Wherever you feel you can make the greatest contribution, you should,” she said. But she doesn’t see it as her role to define the future of the movement. She told me an anecdote that illustrates

the non-centrality of her role. Last month, on Martin Luther King Day, she and Malachi were driving into San Francisco, where she was scheduled to appear at a community forum, when they heard on the radio that the Bay Bridge had been shut down. Members of a coalition of organizations, including the Bay Area chapter of Black Lives Matter, had driven onto the bridge, laced chains through their car windows, and locked them to the girders, shutting down entry to the city from Oakland. Garza had known that there were plans to mark the holiday with a protest—marches and other events were called across the nation—but she was not informed of this specific activity planned in her own city. “It’s not like there’s a red button I push to make people turn up,” she said. It would have been inconceivable for, say, the S.C.L.C. to have carried out such an ambitious action without the leadership’s being aware of every detail.

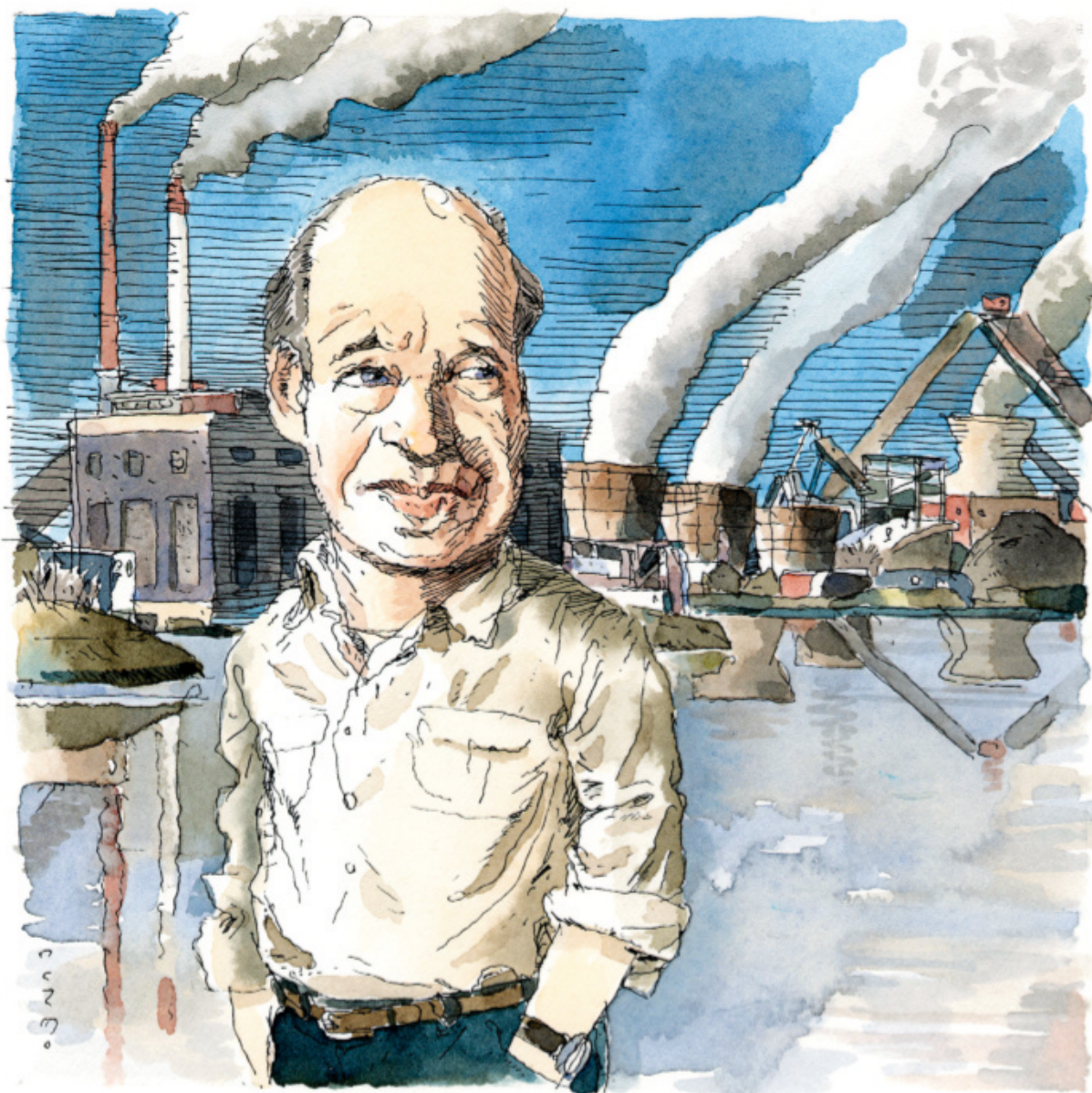
In January, Garza travelled to Washington, to attend President Obama’s final State of the Union address; she had been invited by Barbara Lee, her congressional representative. (Lee, who was the sole member of Congress to vote against the authorization of military force after 9/11, has a high standing among activists who are normally skeptical of elected officials.) After the speech, as Garza stood outside in the cold, trying to hail a cab, she said that she was disappointed. The President had not driven home the need for police reform. He had spoken of economic inequality and a political system rigged to benefit the few, but had scarcely touched upon the implications of that system for African-Americans specifically. From the vantage point of black progressives, his words were a kind of all-lives-matter statement of public policy.

A year from now, Barack Obama will leave office, and with him will go a particular set of expectations of racial rapprochement. So will the sense that what happened in Sanford, Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston, and Staten Island represents a paradox. Black Lives Matter may never have more influence than it has now. The future is not knowable, but it isn’t likely to be unfamiliar. ♦

THE CATASTROPHIST

NASA's climate expert delivers the news no one wants to hear.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT



James Hansen on curbing coal emissions: "The science is clear. This is our one chance."

A few months ago, James Hansen, the director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, in Manhattan, took a day off from work to join a protest in Washington, D.C. The immediate target of the protest was the Capitol Power Plant, which supplies steam and chilled water to congressional offices, but more generally its object was coal, which is the world's leading source of greenhouse-gas emissions. As it happened, on the day of the protest it snowed. Hansen was wearing a trench coat and a wide-brimmed canvas boater. He had forgotten to bring gloves. His sister, who lives in D.C. and had come along to watch over him, told him that he looked like Indiana Jones.

The march to the power plant was

to begin on Capitol Hill, at the Spirit of Justice Park. By the time Hansen arrived, thousands of protesters were already milling around, wearing green hard hats and carrying posters with messages like "Power Past Coal" and "Clean Coal Is Like Dry Water." Hansen was immediately surrounded by TV cameras.

"You are one of the preëminent climatologists in the world," one television reporter said. "How does this square with your science?"

"I'm trying to make clear what the connection is between the science and the policy," Hansen responded. "Somebody has to do it."

The reporter wasn't satisfied. "Civil disobedience?" he asked, in a tone of mock incredulity. Hansen said that he couldn't

let young people put themselves on the line, "and then I stand back behind them."

The reporter still hadn't got what he wanted: "We've heard that you all are planning, even hoping, to get arrested today. Is that true?"

"I wouldn't hope," Hansen said. "But I do want to draw attention to the issue, whatever is necessary to do that."

Hansen, who is sixty-eight, has greenish eyes, sparse brown hair, and the distracted manner of a man who's just lost his wallet. (In fact, he frequently misplaces things, including, on occasion, his car.) Thirty years ago, he created one of the world's first climate models, nicknamed Model Zero, which he used to predict most of what has happened to the climate since. Sometimes he is referred to as the "father of global warming," and sometimes as the grandfather.

Hansen has now concluded, partly on the basis of his latest modelling efforts and partly on the basis of observations made by other scientists, that the threat of global warming is far greater than even he had suspected. Carbon dioxide isn't just approaching dangerous levels; it is already there. Unless immediate action is taken—including the shutdown of all the world's coal plants within the next two decades—the planet will be committed to change on a scale society won't be able to cope with. "This particular problem has become an emergency," Hansen said.

Hansen's revised calculations have prompted him to engage in activities—like marching on Washington—that aging government scientists don't usually go in for. Last September, he travelled to England to testify on behalf of anti-coal activists who were arrested while climbing the smokestack of a power station to spray-paint a message to the Prime Minister. (They were acquitted.) Speaking before a congressional special committee last year, Hansen asserted that fossil-fuel companies were knowingly spreading misinformation about global warming and that their chairmen "should be tried for high crimes against humanity and nature." He has compared freight trains carrying coal to "death trains," and wrote to the head of the National Mining Association, who sent him a letter of complaint, that if the comparison "makes you uncomfortable, well, perhaps it should."

Hansen insists that his intent is not to be provocative but conservative: his only aim is to preserve the world as we know it. “The science is clear,” he said, when it was his turn to address the protesters blocking the entrance to the Capitol Power Plant. “This is our one chance.”

The fifth of seven children, Hansen grew up in Denison, Iowa, a small, sleepy town close to the western edge of the state. His father was a tenant farmer who, after the Second World War, went to work as a bartender. All the kids slept in two rooms. As soon as he was old enough, Hansen went to work, too, delivering the Omaha *World-Herald*. When he was eighteen, he received a scholarship to attend the University of Iowa. It didn’t cover housing, so he rented a room for twenty-five dollars a month and ate mostly cereal. He stayed on at the university to get a Ph.D. in physics, writing his dissertation on the atmosphere of Venus. From there he went directly to the Goddard Institute for Space Studies—GISS, for short—where he took up the study of Venusian clouds.

By all accounts, including his own, Hansen was preoccupied by his research and not much interested in anything else. GISS’s offices are a few blocks south of Columbia University; when riots shut down the campus, in 1968, he barely noticed. At that point, GISS’s computer was the fastest in the world, but it still had to be fed punch cards. “I was staying here late every night, reading in my decks of cards,” Hansen recalled. In 1969, he left GISS for six months to study in the Netherlands. There he met his wife, Anniek, who is Dutch; the couple honeymooned in Florida, near Cape Canaveral, so they could watch an Apollo launch.

In 1973, the first Pioneer Venus mission was announced, and Hansen began designing an instrument—a polarimeter—to be carried on the orbiter. But soon his research interests began to shift earthward. A trio of chemists—they would later share a Nobel Prize—had discovered that chlorofluorocarbons and other man-made chemicals could break down the ozone layer. It had also become clear that greenhouse gases were rapidly building up in the atmosphere.

“We realized that we had a planet that was changing before our eyes, and that’s more interesting,” Hansen told

me. The topic attracted him for much the same reason Venus’s clouds had: there were new research questions to be answered. He decided to try to adapt a computer program that had been designed to forecast the weather to see if it could be used to look further into the future. What would happen to the earth if, for example, greenhouse-gas levels were to double?

“He never worked on any topic thinking it might be any use for the world,” Anniek told me. “He just wanted to figure out the scientific meaning of it.”

When Hansen began his modelling work, there were good theoretical reasons for believing that increasing CO₂ levels would cause the world to warm, but little empirical evidence. Average global temperatures had risen in the nineteen-thirties and forties; then they had declined, in some regions, in the nineteen-fifties and sixties. A few years into his project, Hansen concluded that a new pattern was about to emerge. In 1981, he became the director of GISS. In a paper published that year in *Science*, he forecast that the following decade would be unusually warm. (That turned out to be the case.) In the same paper, he predicted that the nineteen-nineties would be warmer still. (That also turned out to be true.) Finally, he forecast that by the end of the twentieth century a global-warming signal would emerge from the “noise” of natural climate variability. (This, too, proved to be correct.)

Later, Hansen became even more specific. In 1990, he bet a roomful of scientists that that year, or one of the following two, would be the warmest on record. (Within nine months, he had won the bet.) In 1991, he predicted that, owing to the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, in the Philippines, average global temperatures would drop and then, a few years later, recommence their upward climb, which was precisely what happened.

From early on, the significance of Hansen’s insights was recognized by the scientific community. “The work that he did in the seventies, eighties, and nineties was absolutely groundbreaking,” Spencer Weart, a physicist turned historian who has studied the efforts to understand climate change, told me. He added, “It does help to be right.” “I have a whole folder in my drawer labelled

‘Canonical Papers,’” Michael Oppenheimer, a climate scientist at Princeton, said. “About half of them are Jim’s.”

Because of its implications for humanity, Hansen’s work also attracted considerable attention from the world at large. His 1981 paper prompted the first front-page article on climate change that ran in the *Times*—“STUDY FINDS WARMING TREND THAT COULD RAISE SEA LEVELS,” the headline read—and within a few years he was regularly being invited to testify before Congress. Still, Hansen says, he didn’t imagine himself playing any role besides that of a research scientist. He is, he has written, “a poor communicator” and “not tactful.”

“He’s very shy,” Ralph Cicerone, the president of the National Academy of Sciences, who has known Hansen for nearly forty years, told me. “And, as far as I can tell, he does not enjoy a lot of his public work.”

“Jim doesn’t really like to look at anyone,” Anniek Hansen told me. “I say, ‘Just look at them!’”

Throughout the nineteen-eighties and nineties, the evidence of climate change—and its potential hazards—continued to grow. Hansen kept expecting the political system to respond. This, after all, was what had happened with the ozone problem. Proof that chlorofluorocarbons were destroying the ozone layer came in 1985, when British scientists discovered that an ozone “hole” had opened up over Antarctica. The crisis was resolved—or, at least, prevented from growing worse—by an international treaty phasing out chlorofluorocarbons which was ratified in 1987.

“At first, Jim’s work didn’t take an activist bent at all,” the writer Bill McKibben, who has followed Hansen’s career for more than twenty years and helped organize the anti-coal protest in D.C., told me. “I think he thought, as did I, If we get this set of facts out in front of everybody, they’re so powerful—overwhelming—that people will do what needs to be done. Of course, that was naïve on both our parts.”

As recently as the George W. Bush Administration, Hansen was still operating as if getting the right facts in front of the right people would be enough. In 2001, he was invited to speak to Vice-President Dick Cheney and other high-level Administration officials. For the meeting,

he prepared a detailed presentation titled “The Forcings Underlying Climate Change.” In 2003, he was invited to Washington again, to meet with the head of the Council on Environmental Quality at the White House. This time, he offered a presentation on what ice-core records show about the sensitivity of the climate to changes in greenhouse-gas concentrations. But by 2004 the Administration had dropped any pretense that it was interested in the facts about climate change. That year, NASA, reportedly at the behest of the White House, insisted that all communications between GISS scientists and the outside world be routed through political appointees at the agency. The following year, the Administration prevented GISS from posting its monthly temperature data on its Web site, ostensibly on the ground that proper protocols had not been followed. (The data showed that 2005 was likely to be the warmest year on record.) Hansen was also told that he couldn’t grant a routine interview to National Public Radio. When he spoke out about the restrictions, scientists at other federal agencies complained that they were being similarly treated and a new term was invented: government scientists, it was said, were being “Hansenized.”

“He had been waiting all this time for global warming to become the issue that ozone was,” Anniek Hansen told me. “And he’s very patient. And he just kept on working and publishing, thinking that someone would do something.” She went on, “He started speaking out, not because he thinks he’s good at it, not because he enjoys it, but because of necessity.”

“When Jim makes up his mind, he pursues whatever conclusion he has to the end point,” Michael Oppenheimer said. “And he’s made up his mind that you have to pull out all the stops at this point, and that all his scientific efforts would come to naught if he didn’t also involve himself in political action.” Starting in 2007, Hansen began writing to world leaders, including Prime Minister Gordon Brown, of Britain, and Yasuo Fukuda, then the Prime Minister of Japan. In December, 2008, he composed a personal appeal to Barack and Michelle Obama.

“A stark scientific conclusion, that we must reduce greenhouse gases below present amounts to preserve nature and hu-

manity, has become clear,” Hansen wrote. “It is still feasible to avert climate disasters, but only if policies are consistent with what science indicates to be required.” Hansen gave the letter to Obama’s chief science adviser, John Holdren, with whom he is friendly, and Holdren, he says, promised to deliver it. But Hansen never heard back, and by the spring he had begun to lose faith in the new Administration. (In an e-mail, Holdren said that he could not discuss “what I have or haven’t given or said to the President.”)

“I had had hopes that Obama understood the reality of the issue and would seize the opportunity to marry the energy and climate and national-security issues and make a very strong program,” Hansen told me. “Maybe he still will, but I’m getting bad feelings about it.”

There are lots of ways to lose an audience with a discussion of global warming, and new ones, it seems, are being discovered all the time. As well as anyone, Hansen ought to know this; still, he persists in trying to make contact. He frequently gives public lectures; just in the past few months, he has spoken to Native Americans in Washington, D.C.; college students at Dartmouth; high-school students in Copenhagen; concerned citizens, including King Harald, in Oslo; renewable-energy enthusiasts in Milwaukee; folk-music fans in Beacon, New York; and public-health professionals in Manhattan.

In April, I met up with Hansen at the state capitol in Concord, New Hamp-



shire, where he had been invited to speak by local anti-coal activists. There had been only a couple of days to publicize the event; nevertheless, more than two hundred and fifty people showed up. I asked a woman from the town of Ossipee why she had come. “It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hear bad news straight from the horse’s mouth,” she said. For the event, Hansen had, as usual,

prepared a PowerPoint presentation. It was projected onto a screen beside a faded portrait of George Washington. The first slide gave the title of the talk, “The Climate Threat to the Planet,” along with the disclaimer “Any statements relating to policy are personal opinion.”

Hansen likes to begin his talk with a highly compressed but still perilously long discussion of climate history, beginning in the early Eocene, some fifty million years ago. At that point, CO₂ levels were high and, as Hansen noted, the world was very warm: there was practically no ice on the planet, and palm trees grew in the Arctic. Then CO₂ levels began to fall. No one is entirely sure why, but one possible cause has to do with weathering processes that, over many millennia, allow carbon dioxide from the air to get bound up in limestone. As CO₂ levels declined, the planet grew cooler; Hansen flashed some slides on the screen, which showed that, between fifty million and thirty-five million years ago, deep-ocean temperatures dropped by more than ten degrees. Eventually, around thirty-four million years ago, temperatures sank low enough that glaciers began to form on Antarctica. By around three million years ago—perhaps earlier—permanent ice sheets had begun to form in the Northern Hemisphere as well. Then, about two million years ago, the world entered a period of recurring glaciations. During the ice ages—the most recent one ended about twelve thousand years ago—CO₂ levels dropped even further.

What is now happening, Hansen explained to the group in New Hampshire, is that climate history is being run in reverse and at high speed, like a cassette tape on rewind. Carbon dioxide is being pumped into the air some ten thousand times faster than natural weathering processes can remove it.

“So humans now are in charge of atmospheric composition,” Hansen said. Then he corrected himself: “Well, we’re determining it, whether we’re in charge or not.”

Among the many risks of running the system backward is that the ice sheets formed on the way forward will start to disintegrate. Once it begins, this process is likely to be self-reinforcing. “If we burn all the fossil fuels and put all that CO₂ into the atmosphere, we will be sending the planet back to the ice-

EMMETT TILL'S GLASS-TOP CASKET

By the time they cracked me open again, topside,
abandoned in a toolshed, I had become another kind of nest.
Not many people connect possums with Chicago,

but this is where the city ends, after all, and I float
still, after the footfalls fade and the roots bloom around us.
The fact was, everything that worked for my young man

worked for my new tenants. The fact was, he had been
gone for years. They lifted him from my embrace, and I was
empty, ready. That's how the possums found me, friend,

dry-docked, a tattered mercy hull. Once I held a boy
who didn't look like a boy. When they finally remembered,
they peeked through my clear top. Then their wild surprise.

—*Cornelius Eady*

free state," Hansen said. "It will take a while to get there—ice sheets don't melt instantaneously—but that's what we will be doing. And if you melt all the ice, sea levels will go up two hundred and fifty feet. So you can't do that without producing a different planet."

There's no precise term for the level of CO₂ that will assure a climate disaster; the best that scientists and policymakers have been able to come up with is the phrase "dangerous anthropogenic interference," or D.A.I. Most official discussions have been premised on the notion that D.A.I. will not be reached until CO₂ levels hit four hundred and fifty parts per million. Hansen, however, has concluded that the threshold for D.A.I. is much lower.

"The bad news is that it's become clear that the dangerous amount of carbon dioxide is no more than three hundred and fifty parts per million," he told the crowd in Concord. The *really* bad news is that CO₂ levels have already reached three hundred and eighty-five parts per million. (For the ten thousand years prior to the industrial revolution, carbon-dioxide levels were about two hundred and eighty parts per million, and if current emissions trends continue they will reach four hundred and fifty parts by around 2035.)

Once you accept that CO₂ levels are already too high, it's obvious, Hansen

argues, what needs to be done. He displayed a chart of known fossil-fuel reserves represented in terms of their carbon content. There was a short bar for oil, a shorter bar for natural gas, and a tall bar for coal.

"We've already used about half of the oil," he observed. "And we're going to use all of the oil and natural gas that's easily available. It's owned by Russia and Saudi Arabia, and we can't tell them not to sell it. So, if you look at the size of these fossil-fuel reservoirs, it becomes very clear. The only way we can constrain the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is to cut off the coal source, by saying either we will leave the coal in the ground or we will burn it only at power plants that actually capture the CO₂." Such power plants are often referred to as "clean coal plants." Although there has been a great deal of talk about them lately, at this point there are no clean-coal plants in commercial operation, and, for a combination of technological and economic reasons, it's not clear that there ever will be.

Hansen continued, "If we had a moratorium on any new coal plants and phased out existing ones over the next twenty years, we could get back to three hundred and fifty parts per million within several decades." Reforestation, for example, if practiced on a massive scale, could begin to draw global CO₂ levels down, Hansen says, "so it's tech-

nically feasible." But "it requires us to take action promptly."

Coincidentally, that afternoon a vote was scheduled in the New Hampshire state legislature on a proposal involving the state's largest coal-fired power plant, the Merrimack Station, in the town of Bow. The station's owner was planning to spend several hundred million dollars to reduce mercury emissions from the plant—a cost that it planned to pass on to ratepayers. Hansen, who said he thought the plant should simply be shut, called the plan a "terrible waste of money." A lawmaker sympathetic to this view had introduced a bill calling for more study of the project, but, as several people who came up to speak to Hansen after his talk explained, it was opposed by the state's construction unions and seemed headed for defeat. (Less than an hour later, the bill was rejected in committee by a unanimous vote.)

"I assume you're used to telling policymakers the truth and then having them ignore you," one man said to Hansen.

Hansen smiled ruefully. "You're right."

In scientific circles, worries about D.A.I. are widespread. During the past few years, researchers around the world have noticed a disturbing trend: the planet is changing faster than had been anticipated. Antarctica, for example, had not been expected to show a net loss of ice for another century, but recent studies indicate that the continent's massive ice sheets are already shrinking. At the other end of the globe, the Arctic ice cap has been melting at a shocking rate; the extent of the summer ice is now only a little more than half of what it was just forty years ago. Meanwhile, scientists have found that the arid zones that circle the globe north and south of the tropics have been expanding more rapidly than computer models had predicted. This expansion of the subtropics means that highly populated areas, including the American Southwest and the Mediterranean basin, are likely to suffer more and more frequent droughts.

"Certainly, I think the shrinking of the Arctic ice cap made a very strong impression on a lot of scientists," Spencer Weart, the physicist, told me. "And these things keep popping up. You think, What, another one? Another one? They're almost all in the wrong

direction, in the direction of making the change worse and faster."

"In nearly all areas, the developments are occurring more quickly than had been assumed," Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, the head of Germany's Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, recently observed. "We are on our way to a destabilization of the world climate that has advanced much further than most people or their governments realize."

Obama's science adviser, John Holdren, a physicist on leave from Harvard, has said that he believes "any reasonably comprehensive and up-to-date look at the evidence makes clear that civilization has already generated dangerous anthropogenic interference in the climate system."

There is also broad agreement among scientists that coal represents the most serious threat to the climate. Coal now provides half the electricity in the United States. In China, that figure is closer to eighty per cent, and a new coal-fired power plant comes online every week or

two. As oil supplies dwindle, there will still be plenty of coal, which could be—and in some places already is being—converted into a very dirty liquid fuel. Before Steven Chu, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, was appointed to his current post as Energy Secretary, he said in a speech, "There's enough carbon in the ground to really cook us. Coal is my worst nightmare." (These are lines that Hansen is fond of invoking.) A couple of months ago, seven prominent climate scientists from Australia wrote an open letter to the owners of that country's major utility companies urging that "no new coal-fired power stations, except ones that have ZERO emissions," be built. They also recommended an "urgent program" to phase out old plants.

"The unfortunate reality is that genuine action on climate change will require that existing coal-fired power stations cease to operate in the near future," the group wrote.

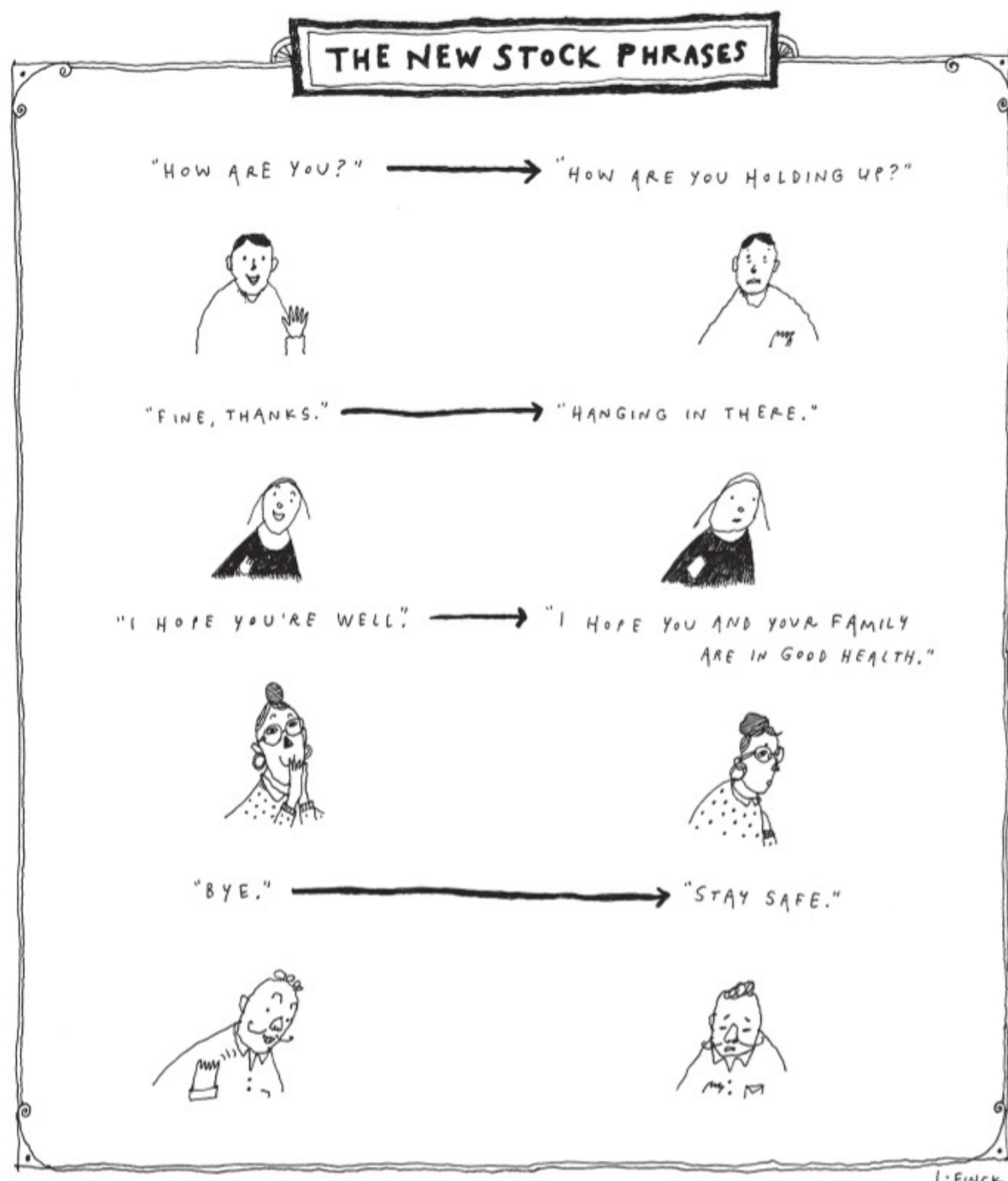
But if Hansen's anxieties about D.A.I.

and coal are broadly shared, he is still, among climate scientists, an outlier. "Almost everyone in the scientific community is prepared to say that if we don't do something now to reverse the direction we're going in we either already are or will very, very soon be in the danger zone," Naomi Oreskes, a historian of science and a provost at the University of California at San Diego, told me. "But Hansen talks in stronger terms. He's using adjectives. He has started to speak in moral terms, and that always makes scientists uncomfortable."

Hansen is also increasingly isolated among climate activists. "I view Jim Hansen as heroic as a scientist," Eileen Claussen, the president of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, said. "He was there at the beginning, he's faced all kinds of pressures politically, and he's done a terrific job, I think, of keeping focussed. But I wish he would stick to what he really knows. Because I don't think he has a realistic view of what is politically possible, or what the best policies would be to deal with this problem."

In Washington, the only approach to limiting emissions that is seen as having any chance of being enacted is a so-called "cap and trade" system. Under such a system, the government would set an over-all cap for CO₂ emissions, then allocate allowances to major emitters, like power plants and oil refineries, which could be traded on a carbon market. In theory, at least, the system would discourage fossil-fuel use by making emitters pay for what they are putting out. But to the extent that such a system has been tried, by the members of the European Union, its results so far are inconclusive, and Hansen argues that it is essentially a sham. (He recently referred to it as "the Temple of Doom.") What is required, he insists, is a direct tax on carbon emissions. The tax should be significant at the start—equivalent to roughly a dollar per gallon for gasoline—and then grow steeper over time. The revenues from the tax, he believes, ought to be distributed back to Americans on a per-capita basis, so that households that use less energy would actually make money, even as those that use more would find it increasingly expensive to do so.

"The only defense of this monstrous absurdity that I have heard," Hansen



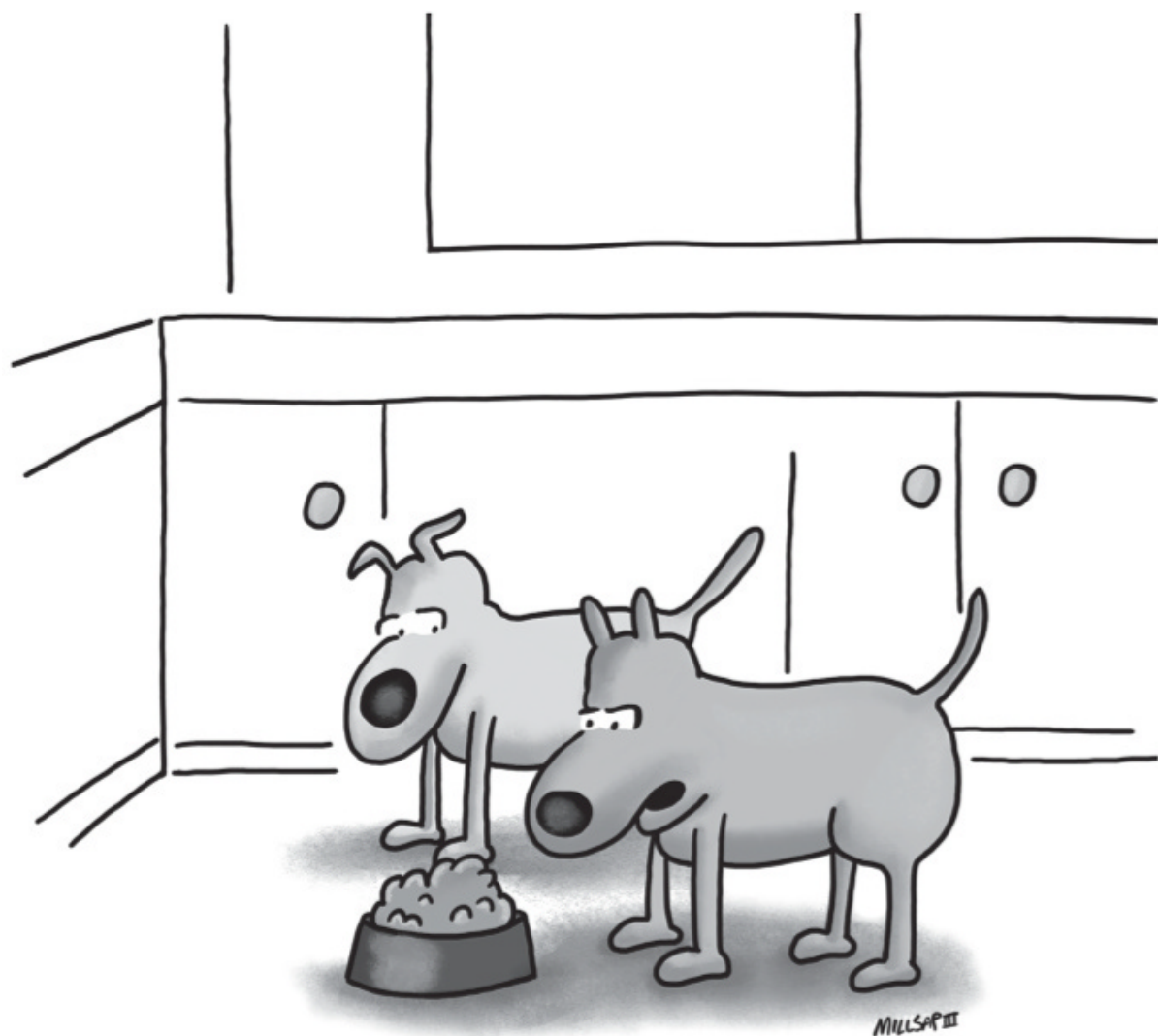
wrote a few weeks ago, referring to a cap-and-trade system, “is ‘Well, you are right, it’s no good, but the train has left the station.’ If the train has left, it had better be derailed soon or the planet, and all of us, will be in deep do-do.”

GISS’s headquarters, at 112th Street and Broadway, sits above Tom’s Restaurant, the diner made famous by “Seinfeld” and Suzanne Vega. Hansen has occupied the same office, on the seventh floor, since he became the director of the institute, almost three decades ago. One day last month, I went to visit him there. Hansen told me that he had been trying to computerize his old files; still, the most striking thing about the spacious office, which is largely taken up by three wooden tables, is that every available surface is covered with stacks of paper.

During the week, Hansen lives in an apartment just a few blocks from his office, but on weekends he and Anniek frequently go to an eighteenth-century house that they own in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and their son and daughter, who have children of their own, come to visit. Hansen dotes on his grandchildren—in many hours of conversation with me, just about the only time that he spoke with unalloyed enthusiasm was when he discussed planting trees with them this spring—and he claims they are the major reason for his activism. “I decided that I didn’t want my grandchildren to say, ‘Opa understood what was happening, but he didn’t make it clear,’” he explained.

The day that I visited Hansen’s office, the House Energy and Commerce Committee was beginning its markup of a cap-and-trade bill co-sponsored by the committee’s chairman, Henry Waxman, of California. The bill—the American Clean Energy and Security Act—has the stated goal of cutting the country’s carbon emissions by seventeen per cent by 2020. It is the most significant piece of climate legislation to make it this far in the House. Hansen pointed out that the bill explicitly allows for the construction of new coal plants and predicted that it would, if passed, prove close to meaningless. He said that he thought it would probably be best if the bill failed, so that Congress could “come back and do it more sensibly.”

I said that if the bill failed I thought it was more likely Congress would let



“I wish they would stop putting food in my hat.”

the issue drop, and that was one reason most of the country’s major environmental groups were backing it.

“This is just stupidity on the part of environmental organizations in Washington,” Hansen said. “The fact that some of these organizations have become part of the Washington ‘go along, get along’ establishment is very unfortunate.”

Hansen argues that politicians willfully misunderstand climate science; it could be argued that Hansen just as willfully misunderstands politics. In order to stabilize carbon-dioxide levels in the atmosphere, annual global emissions would have to be cut by something on the order of three-quarters. In order to draw them down, agricultural and forestry practices would have to change dramatically as well. So far, at least, there is no evidence that any nation is willing to take anything approaching the necessary steps. On the contrary, almost all the trend lines point in the opposite direction. Just because the world desperately needs a solution that satisfies both the scientific and the political constraints doesn’t mean one necessarily exists.

For his part, Hansen argues that while the laws of geophysics are immutable, those of society are ours to determine. When I said that it didn’t seem feasible to expect the United States to give up its coal plants, he responded, “We can point to other countries being fifty per cent more energy-efficient than we are. We’re getting fifty per cent of our electricity from coal. That alone should provide a pretty strong argument.”

Then what about China and India?

Both countries are likely to suffer very severely from dramatic climate change, he said. “They’re going to recognize that. In fact, they already are beginning to recognize that.”

“It’s not unrealistic,” he went on. “But the policies have to push us in that direction. And, as long as we let the politicians and the people who are supporting them continue to set the rules, such that ‘business as usual’ continues, or small tweaks to ‘business as usual,’ then it is unrealistic. So we have to change the rules.” He said that he was thinking of attending another demonstration soon, in West Virginia coal country. ♦

GHOSTS IN THE HOUSE

How Toni Morrison fostered a generation of black writers.

BY HILTON ALS

No. 2245 Elyria Avenue in Lorain, Ohio, is a two-story frame house surrounded by look-alikes. Its small front porch is littered with the discards of former tenants: a banged-up bicycle wheel, a plastic patio chair, a garden hose. Most of its windows are boarded up. Behind the house, which is painted lettuce green, there's a patch of weedy earth and a heap of rusting car parts. Seventy-two years ago, the novelist Toni Morrison was born here, in this small industrial town twenty-five miles west of Cleveland, which most citydwellers would consider "out there." The air is redolent of nearby Lake Erie and new-mown grass.

From Morrison's birthplace it's a couple of miles to Broadway, where there's a pizzeria, a bar with sagging seats, and a brown building that sells dingy and dilapidated secondhand furniture. This is the building Morrison imagined when she described the house of the doomed Breedlove family in her first novel, "The Bluest Eye": "There is an abandoned store on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty-fifth Street in Lorain, Ohio," she wrote. "It does not recede into its background of leaden sky, nor harmonize with the gray frame houses and black telephone poles around it. Rather, it foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy. Visitors who drive to this tiny town wonder why it has not been torn down, while pedestrians, who are residents of the neighborhood, simply look away when they pass it."

Love and disaster and all the other forms of human incident accumulate in Morrison's fictional houses. In the boarding house where the heroine of Morrison's second novel, "Sula," lives, "there were rooms that had three doors, others that opened on the porch only and were inaccessible from any other part of the house; others that you could get to only by going through somebody's

bedroom." This is the gothic, dreamlike structure in whose front yard Sula's mother burns to death, "gesturing and bobbing like a sprung jack-in-the-box," while Sula stands by watching, "not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested."

Morrison's houses don't just shelter human dramas; they have dramas of their own. "124 was spiteful," she writes in the opening lines of "Beloved" (1987). "Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way." Living and dead ghosts ramble through No. 124, chained to a history that claims its inhabitants. At the center of Morrison's new novel, "Love," is a deserted seaside hotel—a resort where, in happier times, blacks danced and socialized and swam without any white people complaining that they would contaminate the water—built by Bill Cooney, a legendary black entrepreneur, and haunted by his memory.

Morrison spends about half her time in a converted boathouse that overlooks the Hudson in Rockland County. The boathouse is a long, narrow, blue structure with white trim and large windows. A decade ago, when Morrison was in Princeton, where she teaches, it burned to the ground. Because it was a very cold winter, the water the firefighters used froze several important artifacts, including Morrison's manuscripts. "But what they can't save are little things that mean a lot, like your children's report cards," she told me, her eyes filling with tears. She shook her head and said, "Let's not go there."

We were in the third-floor parlor, furnished with overstuffed chairs covered in crisp gray linen, where we talked over the course of two days last summer. Sun streamed through the windows and a beautiful blue-toned abstract painting by the younger of her two sons, Slade,

hung on the wall. As we chatted, Morrison wasn't in the least distracted by the telephone ringing or the activities of her housekeeper or her secretary. She is known for her powers of concentration. When she is not writing or teaching, she likes to watch "Law & Order" and "Waking the Dead"—crime shows that offer what she described as "mild engagement with a satisfying structure of redemption." She reads and rereads novels by Ruth Rendell and Martha Grimes.

Morrison had on a white shirt over a black leotard, black trousers, and a pair of high-heeled alligator sandals. Her long silver dreadlocks cascaded down her back and were gathered at the end by a silver clip. When she was mock-amazed by an insight, she flushed. Her light-brown eyes, with their perpetually listening or amused expression, are the eyes of a watcher—and of someone who is used to being watched. But if she is asked a question she doesn't appreciate, a veil descends over her eyes, discontinuing the conversation. (When I tried to elicit her opinion about the novels of one of her contemporaries, she said, "I hear the movie is fab," and turned away.) Morrison's conversation, like her fiction, is conducted in high style. She underlines important points by making showy arabesques with her fingers in the air, and when she is amused she lets out a cry that's followed by a fusillade of laughter.

"You know, my sister Lois was just here taking care of me," she said. "I had a cataract removed in one eye. Suddenly, the world was so bright. And I looked at myself in the mirror and wondered, Who is that woman? When did she get to be that age? My doctor said, 'You have been looking at yourself through the lens that they shoot Elizabeth Taylor through.' I couldn't stop wondering how I got to be this age."

When "The Bluest Eye" was published, in 1970, Morrison was unknown and thirty-nine years old. The initial print



"Being a black woman writer is not a shallow place to write from," Morrison says. "It doesn't limit my imagination; it expands it."

run was modest: two thousand copies in hardcover. Now a first edition can fetch upward of six thousand dollars. In 2000, when “The Bluest Eye” became a selection for Oprah’s Book Club, Plume sold more than eight hundred thousand paperback copies. By then, Toni Morrison had become Toni Morrison—the first African-American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1993. Following “The Bluest Eye,” Morrison published seven more novels: “Sula” (1973), “Song of Solomon” (1977), “Tar Baby” (1981), “Beloved” (1987), “Jazz” (1992), “Paradise” (1998), and now “Love.” Morrison also wrote a critical study, “Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination” (1992), which, like all her novels since “Song of Solomon,” became a best-seller. She has edited several anthologies—about O.J., about the Clarence Thomas hearings—as well as collections of the writings of Huey P. Newton and James Baldwin. With her son Slade, she has co-authored a number of books for children. She wrote the book for a musical, “New Orleans” (1983); a play, “Dreaming Emmett” (1986), which reimagined the life and death of Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old black boy who was murdered in Mississippi in 1955; a song cycle with the composer André Previn; and, most recently, an opera based on the life of Margaret Garner, the slave whose story inspired “Beloved.” She was an editor at Random House for nineteen years—she still reads the *Times* with pencil in hand, copy-editing as she goes—and has been the Robert F. Goheen Pro-

fessor in the Council of the Humanities at Princeton since 1989.

“I know it seems like a lot,” Morrison said. “But I really only do one thing. I read books. I teach books. I write books. I think about books. It’s one job.” What Morrison has managed to do with that job—and the criticism, pro and con, she has received for doing it—has made her one of the most widely written-about American authors of the past fifty years. (The latest study of her work, she told me, is a comparison of the vernacular in her novels and William Faulkner’s. “I don’t believe it,” I said. “*Believe* it,” she said, emphatically.) Morrison—required reading in high schools across the country—is almost always treated as a spokeswoman for her gender and her race. In a review of “Paradise,” Patricia Storace wrote, “Toni Morrison is relighting the angles from which we view American history, changing the very color of its shadows, showing whites what they look like in black mirrors. To read her work is to witness something unprecedented, an invitation to a literature to become what it has claimed to be, a truly American literature.” It’s a claim that her detractors would also make, to opposite effect.

“I’m already discredited, I’m already politicized, before I get out of the gate,” Morrison said. “I can accept the labels”—the adjectives like “black” and “female” that are often attached to her work—“because being a black woman writer is not a shallow place but a rich place to write from. It doesn’t limit my imagination;

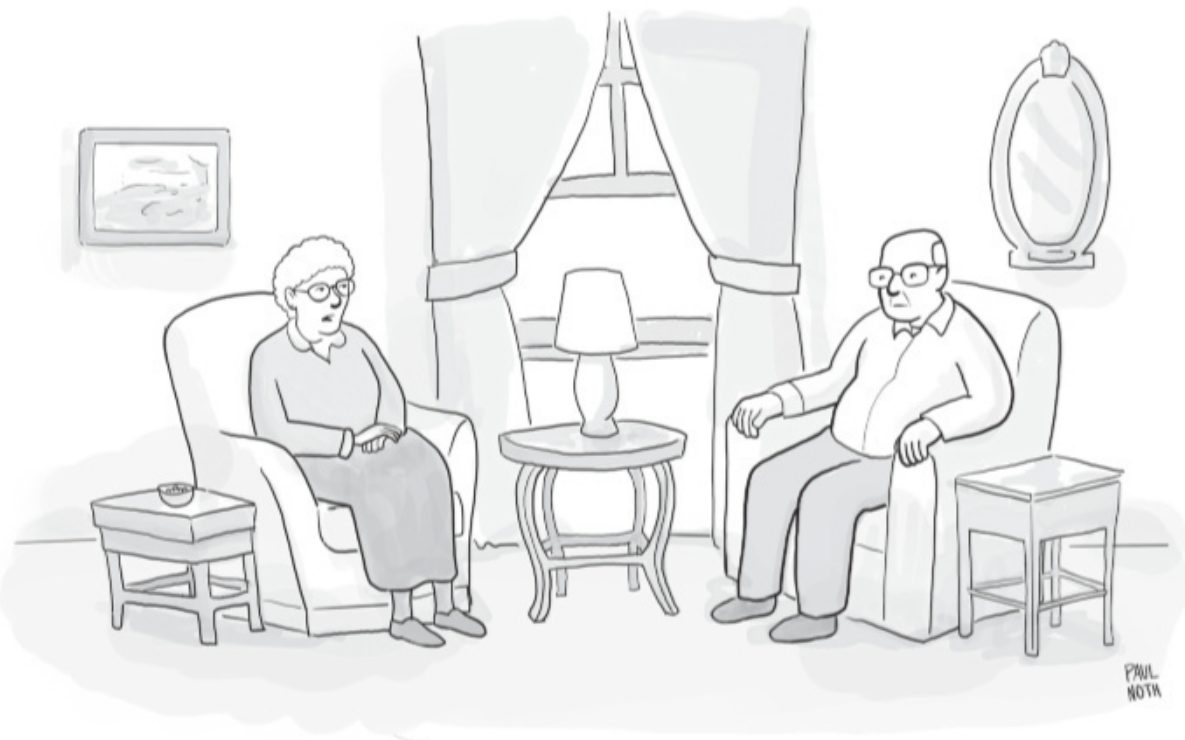
it expands it. It’s richer than being a white male writer because I know more and I’ve experienced more.”

Morrison also owns a home in Princeton, where nine years ago she founded the Princeton Atelier, a program that invites writers and performing artists to workshop student plays, stories, and music. (Last year, she brought in the poet Paul Muldoon as a co-director.) “I don’t write when I’m teaching,” she said. “Teaching is about taking things apart; writing is about putting things together.” She and her sons own an apartment building farther up the Hudson, which houses artists, and another building across the street from it, which her elder son Ford, an architect, is helping her remodel into a study and performance center. “My sister Lois said that the reason I buy all these houses is because we had to move so often as children,” Morrison said, laughing.

Morrison’s family—the Woffords—lived in at least six different apartments over the course of her childhood. One of them was set on fire by the landlord when the Woffords couldn’t pay the rent—four dollars a month. In those days, Toni, the second of four children (she had two brothers, now dead), was called Chloe Ardelia. Her parents, George and Ramah, like the Breedloves, were originally from the South (Ramah was born in Greenville, Alabama; George in Cartersville, Georgia). Like many transplanted Southerners, George worked at U.S. Steel, which was particularly active during the Second World War and attracted not only American blacks but also displaced Europeans: Poles, Greeks, and Italians.

Morrison describes her father as a perfectionist, someone who was proud of his work. “I remember my daddy taking me aside—this was when he worked as a welder—and telling me that he welded a perfect seam that day, and that after welding the perfect seam he put his initials on it,” she recalled. “I said, ‘Daddy, no one will ever see that.’ Sheets and sheets of siding would go over that, you know? And he said, ‘Yes, but I’ll know it’s there.’” George also worked odd jobs, washing cars and the like, after hours at U.S. Steel. Morrison remembers that he always had at least two other jobs.

Ramah, a devout member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was a homemaker. From the first, it was clear



“At this point, I’d forgive any past indiscretions just for some new stories.”

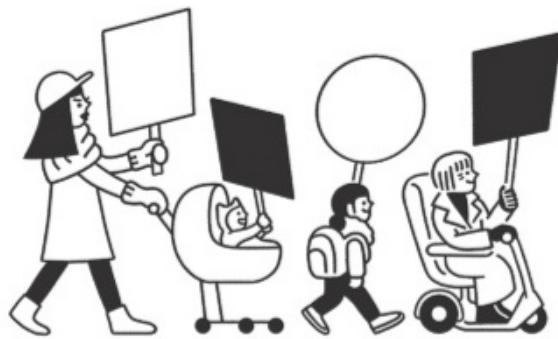
that Morrison was not made to follow in her footsteps. “I remember going outside to hang some clothes on the line,” she said. “And I held the pants up, I hooked them by the inside pockets. And whatever else I was doing, it was completely wrong. Then my mother or my grandmother came out and they just started to laugh, because I didn’t know how to hang up clothes.” Her parents seemed to have different expectations for her, anyway. “I developed a kind of individualism—apart from the family—that was very much involved in my own daydreaming, my own creativity, and my own reading. But primarily—and this has been true all my life—not really minding what other people said, just not minding.”

The Woffords told their children stories and sang songs. After dinner, their grandfather would sometimes take out his violin and everyone would dance. And no matter how many times Ramah told the ghost stories she had learned from her mother and her Auntie Bell in Alabama, Chloe always wanted to hear more. She used to say, “Mama, please tell the story about this or that,” her mother recalled in a 1982 interview with the *Lorain Journal*. “Finally I’d get tired of telling the stories over and over again. So I made up a new story.” Ramah’s stories sparked Morrison’s imagination. She fell in love with spoken language.

Morrison always lived, she said, “below or next to white people,” and the schools were integrated—stratification in Lorain was more economic than racial—but in the Wofford house there was an intense suspicion of white people. In a 1976 essay, Morrison recalled watching her father attack a white man he’d discovered lurking in their apartment building. “My father, distrusting every word and every gesture of every white man on earth, assumed that the white man who crept up the stairs one afternoon had come to molest his daughters and threw him down the stairs and then our tricycle after him. (I think my father was wrong, but considering what I have seen since, it may have been very healthy for me to have witnessed that as my first black-white encounter.)” I asked her about the story. “The man was a threat to us, we thought,” Morrison replied. “He scared us. I’m sure that man was drunk, you know, but the important thing was the notion that my father was a protector, and particularly

against the white man. Seeing that physical confrontation with a white man and knowing that my father could win thrilled, excited, and pleased me. It made me know that it was possible to win.”

Morrison’s family was spread along a color spectrum. “My great-grandmother was very black, and because we were light-skinned blacks, she thought that we had been ‘tampered with,’” she said. “She found lighter-skinned blacks to be impure—which was the opposite of what



the world was saying about skin color and the hierarchy of skin color. My father, who was light-skinned, also preferred darker-skinned blacks.” Morrison, who didn’t absorb her father’s racism, continues to grapple with these ideas and argue against their implications. In a television interview some years ago, she said that in art “there should be everything from Hasidic Jews to Walter Lippmann. Or, as I was telling a friend, there should be everything from reggae hair to Ralph Bunche. There should be an effort to strengthen the differences and keep them, so long as no one is punished for them.” Morrison addressed her great-grandmother’s notion of racial purity in “Paradise,” where it is the oppressive basis for a Utopian community formed by a group of dark blacks from the South.

As a child, Morrison read virtually everything, from drawing-room comedies to Theodore Dreiser, from Jane Austen to Richard Wright. She was compiling, in her head, a reading list to mine for inspiration. At Hawthorne Junior High School, she read “Huckleberry Finn” for the second time. “Fear and alarm are what I remember most about my first encounter” with it, she wrote several years ago. “My second reading of it, under the supervision of an English teacher in junior high school, was no less uncomfortable—rather more. It provoked a feeling I can only describe now as muffled rage, as though appreciation of the work required my complicity in and sanction of

something shaming. Yet the satisfactions were great: riveting episodes of flight, of cunning; the convincing commentary on adult behavior, watchful and insouciant; the authority of a child’s voice in language cut for its renegade tongue and sharp intelligence. Nevertheless, for the second time, curling through the pleasure, clouding the narrative reward, was my original alarm, coupled now with a profoundly distasteful complicity.”

When she was twelve years old, Morrison converted to Catholicism, taking Anthony as her baptismal name, after St. Anthony. Her friends shortened it to Toni. In junior high, one of her teachers sent a note home to her mother: “You and your husband would be remiss in your duties if you do not see to it that this child goes to college.” Shortly before graduating from Lorain High School—where she was on the debating team, on the yearbook staff, and in the drama club (“I wanted to be a dancer, like Maria Tallchief”)—Morrison told her parents that she’d like to go to college. “I want to be surrounded by black intellectuals,” she said, and chose Howard University, in Washington, D.C. In support of her decision, George Wofford took a second union job, which was against the rules of U.S. Steel. In the *Lorain Journal* article, Ramah Wofford remembered that his supervisors found out and called him on it. “‘Well, you folks got me,’” Ramah recalled George’s telling them. “‘I am doing another job, but I’m doing it to send my daughter to college. I’m determined to send her and if I lose my job here, I’ll get another job and do the same.’ It was so quiet after George was done talking, you could have heard a pin drop. . . . And they let him stay and let him do both jobs.” To give her daughter pocket money, Ramah Wofford worked in the rest room of an amusement park, handing out towels. She sent the tips to her daughter with care packages of canned tuna, crackers, and sardines.

Morrison loved her classes at Howard, but she found the social climate stifling. In Washington in the late forties, the buses were still segregated and the black high schools were divided by skin tone, as in the Deep South. The system was replicated at Howard. “On campus itself, the students were very much involved in that ranking, and your skin gave you access to certain things,”

Morrison said. “There was something called ‘the paper-bag test’—darker than the paper bag put you in one category, similar to the bag put you in another, and lighter was yet another and the most privileged category. I thought them to be idiotic preferences.” She was drawn to the drama department, which she felt was more interested in talent than in skin color, and toured the South with the Howard University Players. The itineraries were planned very carefully, but once in a while, because of inclement weather or a flat tire, the troupe would arrive in a town too late to check in to the “colored” motel. Then one of the professors would open the Yellow Pages and call the minister of the local Zion or Baptist church, and the players would be put up by members of the congregation. “There was something not just endearing but welcoming and restorative in the lives of those people,” she said. “I think the exchange between Irving Howe and Ralph Ellison is along those lines: Ralph Ellison said something nice about living in the South, and Irving Howe said, ‘Why would you want to live in such an evil place?’ Because all he was thinking about was rednecks. And Ralph Ellison said, ‘Black people live there.’”

After graduating from Howard, in 1953, she went on to Cornell, where she earned a master’s degree in American literature, writing a thesis titled “Virginia Woolf’s and William Faulkner’s Treatment of the Alienated.” What she saw in their work—“an effort to discover what pattern of existence is most conducive to honesty and self-knowledge, the prime requisites for living a significant life”—she emulated in her own life. She went back to Howard to teach, and Stokely Carmichael was one of her students. Around this time, she met and married Harold Morrison, a Jamaican-born architect. She joined a writing group, where the one rule was that you had to bring something to read every week. Among the writers in that group were the playwright and director Owen Dodson and his companion the painter Charles Sebree. At first, Morrison said, she brought in “all that old junk from high school.” Then she began writing a story about a little black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who wanted blue eyes.

“I wanted to take the name of Peola”—the “tragic mulatto” character from the

1934 movie “Imitation of Life”—“and play with it, turn it around,” Morrison said. When she was young, she said, “another little black girl and I were discussing whether there was a real God or not. I said there was, and she said there wasn’t and she had proof: she had prayed for, and not been given, blue eyes. I just remember listening to her and imagining her with blue eyes, and it was a grotesque thing. She had these high cheekbones and these great big slanted dark eyes, and all I remember thinking was that if she had blue eyes she would be horrible.”

When Morrison read the story to the writing group, Sebree turned to her and said, “*You* are a writer.”

In 1964, Morrison returned to Lorain. Her marriage had fallen apart and she had to determine how she was going to take care of her family—her son Ford was three years old and Slade was on the way. An ad in *The New York Review of Books* listed a position with L. W. Singer, a textbook division of Random House that was based in Syracuse. Morrison applied for and got the job. She took her babies (Slade was born in 1965) and moved East. She was thirty-four years old. In Syracuse, she didn’t care to socialize; instead, she returned to the story about the girl who wanted blue eyes and began to expand it. She wrote when she could—usually after the children went to sleep. And since she was the sole support for her children, she couldn’t sacrifice the real world for her art. “I *stole* time to write,” she said. “Writing was my other job—I always kept it over there, away from my ‘real’ work as an editor or teacher.” It took her five years to complete the book, because she enjoyed the process so much.

Holt, Rinehart & Winston published “The Bluest Eye” in 1970, with a picture of Morrison lying on her side against a white backdrop, her hair cut in an Afro. Taken at the moment when fashion met the counterculture—when Black was coöpted as Beautiful and soul-food recipes ran in fashion magazines next to images of Black Panther wives tying their heads up in bright fabric—the picture was the visual equivalent of the book: black, female, individualistic.

Set in Lorain at the end of the Depression, “The Bluest Eye” remains the most autobiographical of Morrison’s

novels. In it, she focusses on the lives of little black girls—perhaps the least likely, least commercially viable story one could tell at the time. Morrison positioned the white world at the periphery; black life was at the center, and black females were at the center of that. Morrison wasn’t sentimental about the black community. Cholly Breedlove rapes his daughter Pecola because it is one of the few forms of power he has (“How dare she love him?” he thinks. “Hadn’t she any sense at all? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? What could his calloused hands produce to make her smile?”); a group of children scapegoat her as her misfortune worsens (“All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness”); and three whores are her only source of tenderness (“Pecola loved them, visited them, and ran their errands. They, in turn, did not despise her”).

The writing, on the other hand, was lush, sensible-minded, and often hilarious. If Morrison had a distinctive style, it was in her rhythms: the leisurely pace of her storytelling. Clearly her writing had grown out of an oral tradition. Rather than confirm the reader’s sense of alienation by employing distancing techniques, Morrison coaxed the reader into believing the tale. She rooted her characters’ lives in something real—certainly in the minds of black readers.

This came at a time when the prevailing sensibility in most American novels was urban and male, an outgrowth of the political and personal concerns that Ellison and Bellow, Baldwin and Roth had developed living in predominantly black or Jewish neighborhoods. Morrison was different. She grew up in an integrated town in the heart of America. “The point was to really open a book that’s about black people, or by a black person, me or anybody,” she said. “In the sixties, most of the literature was understood by the critics as something sociological, a kind of revelation of the lives of these people. So there was a little apprehension, you know—Is it going to make me feel bad, is it going to make me feel good? I said, I’m going to make it as readable as I can, but I’m not going to pull any punches. I don’t have an agenda here.”

One of the few critics to embrace Morrison's work was John Leonard, who wrote in the *Times*, "Miss Morrison exposes the negative of the Dick-and-Jane-and-Mother-and-Father-and-Dog-and-Cat photograph that appears in our reading primers and she does it with a prose so precise, so faithful to speech and so charged with pain and wonder that the novel becomes poetry. . . . 'The Bluest Eye' is also history, sociology, folklore, nightmare and music."

The poet Sonia Sanchez, who taught "The Bluest Eye" in her classroom at Temple University, saw the book as an indictment of American culture. For Pecola, the descendant of slaves, to want the master's blue eyes represents the "second generation of damage in America," Sanchez told me. "For this woman, Toni Morrison, to write this, to show this to us—it was the possible death of a people right there, the death of a younger generation that had been so abused that there was really no hope. What Toni has done with her literature is that she has made us look up and see ourselves. She has authenticated us, and she has also said to America, in a sense, 'Do you know what you did? But, in spite of what you did, here we is. We exist. Look at us.'"

"What was driving me to write was the silence—so many stories untold and unexamined. There was a wide vacuum in the literature," Morrison said. "I was inspired by the silence and absences in the literature." The story she told was a distinctly American one: complicated, crowded, eventful, told from the perspective of innocents. "I think of the voice of the novel as a kind of Greek chorus, one that comments on the action," she once said. She was a social realist, like Dreiser, with the lyricism and storytelling genius of someone like Isak Dinesen.

In 1968, Morrison was transferred to New York to work in Random House's scholastic division. She moved to Queens. ("I never lived in Manhattan," she said. "I always wanted a garden.") A couple of years later, Robert Bernstein, who was then the president of Random House, came across "The Bluest Eye" in a bookstore. "Is this the same woman who works in the scholastic division?" he asked Jason Epstein, then the editorial director of Random House. Morrison had been wanting to move into trade publishing,

and went to see Robert Gottlieb, the editor-in-chief of Knopf, an imprint of Random House. Gottlieb recalled the interview: "I said, 'I like you too much to hire you, because in order to hire you I have to feel free to fire you. But I'd love to publish your books.'" He became her editor, and Morrison got a job under Epstein as a trade editor at Random House.

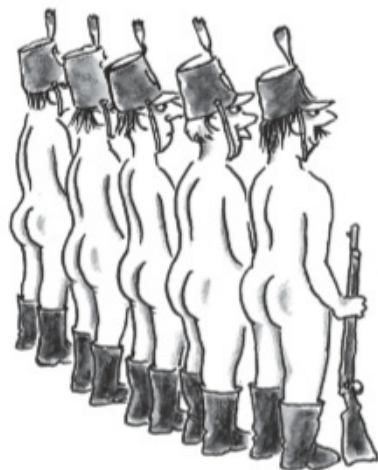
At Random House, Morrison published Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara, and Angela Davis, among others. She was responsible for "The Myth of Lesbianism," one of the first studies of the subject from a major publisher, and "Giant Talk," Quincy Troupe and Rainer Schulte's anthology of Third World writing. Morrison gave me a copy of one of the first books she worked on, "Contemporary African Literature," published in 1972, a groundbreaking collection that included work by Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Léopold-Sédar Senghor, and Athol Fugard. (For some of them, it was their first publication in America.) The book is lavishly illustrated, with many color photographs of African tribesmen and African landscapes. Showing me the table of contents, Morrison said, "What was I thinking? I thought if it was beautiful, people would buy it." (Not many did.)

The women she worked with, in particular, became some of her closest friends. "Single women with children," she said, when I asked her about that era. "If you had to finish writing something, they'd take your kids, or you'd sit with theirs. This was a network of women. They lived in Queens, in Harlem and Brooklyn, and you could rely on one another. If I made a little extra money on some-

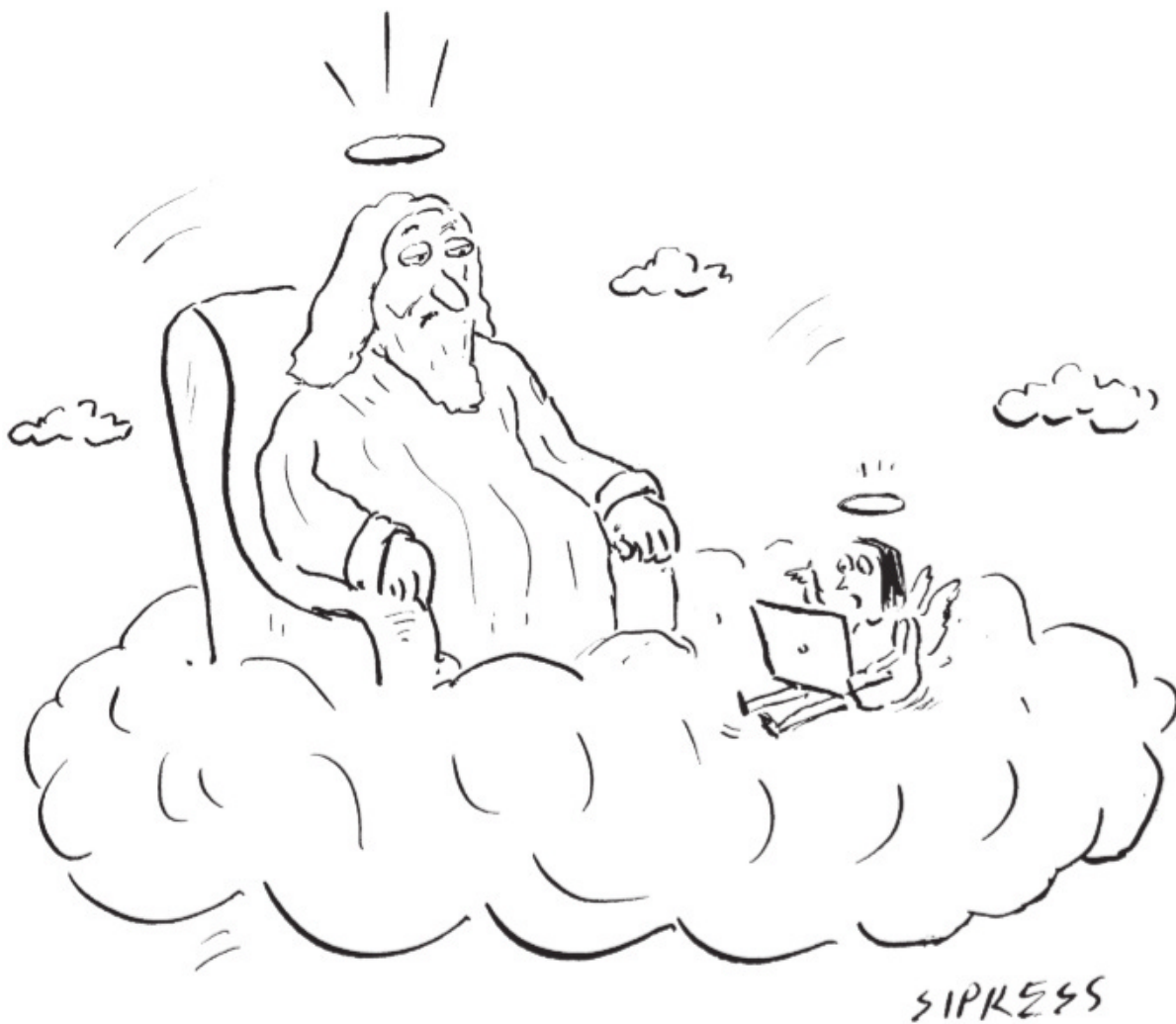
thing—writing freelance—I'd send a check to Toni Cade with a note that said, 'You have won the so-and-so grant,' and so on. I remember Toni Cade coming to my house with groceries and cooking dinner. I hadn't asked her." The support was intellectual as well as practical. Sonia Sanchez told me, "I think we all looked up and saw that we were writing in different genres, but we were experiencing the same kinds of things, and saying similar kinds of things." Their books formed a critical core that people began to see as the rebirth of black women's fiction.

Before the late sixties, there was no real Black Studies curriculum in the academy—let alone a post-colonial-studies program or a feminist one. As an editor and author, Morrison, backed by the institutional power of Random House, provided the material for those discussions to begin. The advent of Black Studies undoubtedly helped Morrison, too: "It was the academic community that gave 'The Bluest Eye' its life," she said. "People assigned it in class. Students bought the paperback."

In order to get attention for her authors—publishers still thought that the ideal book buyer was a thirty-year-old Long Island woman, and reviewers would lump together books by Ishmael Reed and Angela Davis, along with children's books, in a single article—Morrison decided to concentrate on one African-American text each season. She worked diligently. "I wanted to give back something," she said. "I wasn't marching. I didn't go to anything. I didn't join anything. But I could make sure there was a published record of those who did march and did put themselves on the



"You were smart to request a blindfold."



"On the other hand, Louise N., of Metuchen, New Jersey, only gives you three stars."

line. And I didn't want to fail my grandmother. I didn't want to hear her say, 'You went to college and this is all you thought up?' She laughed. "Compared to what my family had gone through and what I felt was my responsibility, the corporation's interest was way down on the list. I was not going to do anything that I thought was nutty or disrupt anything. I thought it was beneficial generally, just like I thought that the books were going to make them a lot of money!"

Morrison's view of contemporary black literature transcended the limitations of the "down with honky" school of black nationalism popularized by writers like Eldridge Cleaver and George Jackson. She preferred to publish writers who had something to say about black American life that reflected its rich experience. In 1974, she put together "The Black Book," a compendium of photographs, drawings, songs, letters, and other documents that charts black American history from slavery through Reconstruction to modern times. The book exercised a great influence over the way black anthropology was viewed.

At first, Random House resisted the idea of "The Black Book." "It just looked to them like a disaster," Morrison said. "Not so much in the way it was being put together, but because they didn't know how to sell it. 'Who is going to buy something called "The Black Book"?' I had my mother on the cover—what were they talking about?" She wrote about the project in the February 2, 1974, issue of *Black World*: "So what was Black life like before it went on TV? . . . I spent the last 18 months trying to do a book that would show some of that. A genuine Black history book—one that simply recollected Black Life as lived. It has no 'order,' no chapters, no major themes. But it does have coherence and sinew. . . . I don't know if it's beautiful or not (it is elegant, however), but it is intelligent, it is profound, it is alive, it is visual, it is creative, it is complex, and it is ours."

Despite all misgivings, the book garnered extraordinary reviews. Writing in the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, Alvin Beam said, "Editors, like novelists, have brain children—books they think up and bring to life without putting their own names

on the title page. Mrs. Morrison has one of these in the stores now, and magazines and newsletters in the publishing trade are ecstatic, saying it will go like hotcakes."

Morrison got a letter from a man in prison who had read the book. "Somebody had given him a copy, and he wrote to say thank you," Morrison told me. "And then he said, 'I need two more copies, because I need one to pass out to other people, and I need another one to throw up against the wall. And I need the one I have to hold close.' So there were readers on, quote, 'both sides of the street,' which is the way they put it." I recall buying "The Black Book" as a teen-ager and feeling as if I had been given a road map of the Brooklyn community where I lived at the time.

"Toni became not a black editor but *the* black editor," a friend of hers told me. In 1975, D. Keith Mano, the "Book Watch" columnist for *Esquire*, devoted an entire article to Gayl Jones and her new book, "Corregidora," but the piece was as much about Morrison as about Jones. "Toni Morrison is Gayl's Sven-gali editor at Random House," Mano wrote. "Toni is dynamic, witty, even boisterous in a good-humored way. And sharp. Very sharp. She often uses the pronoun I. She'll say, 'I published "Corregidora."'" . . . I suspect the title page of 'Corregidora' should read, 'by Gayl Jones, as told to Toni Morrison.'" If Morrison had been a man or white, it seems unlikely that Mano would have noticed her championing of an author. Jones was uncommunicative and Morrison had books to sell. If a writer needed fussing, she fussed, and if not, not.

Morrison was a canny and tireless editor. "You can't be a slouch in Toni's presence," the scholar Eugene Redmond told me. "Her favorite word is 'wakeful.'" (She still gets up at 4 A.M. to work.) When she published the books of Henry Dumas—a little-known novelist and poet whose work was left fragmentary when he was murdered by a transit officer in the New York City subway in 1968, in a case of mistaken identity—she sent copies to Bill Cosby, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, and all the major movie executives and television hosts. In a letter inviting people to read at a tribute to Dumas, she wrote, "He was brilliant. He was magnetic and he was an incredible art-

ist. . . . We are determined to bring to the large community of Black artists and Black people in general this man's work."

The racial climate in the mid-seventies made it especially hard for Morrison to promote certain books—books that might be taken as too radical. Morrison remembered that the marketing department balked when she wanted to have a publication party in a club on 125th Street. No one from Random House came—it was rumored that someone in management had cautioned the staff about the danger—except the publicist and her assistant, who said it was the best party they'd ever been to. A couple of news crews showed up, however, and the party was on the evening news, giving the book hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of free publicity, by Morrison's reckoning. Similarly, Morrison said, when she brought out Muhammad Ali's autobiography, "The Greatest," in 1976, all the department stores that were approached about hosting the book signing backed out, fearing riots and looting. When E. J. Korvette's, the now defunct department store, agreed to host the signing, Morrison brought in members of the Nation of Islam, who came with their families, as peacekeepers. She also installed a white friend, a woman who worked in the sales department, to guard Ali. "You stand right next to Ali," she said. "And when people come up and punch him—'Hey, Champ!'—you stop them. Because he's not going to say it ever, that it hurts when you get a thousand little taps. And when you think Ali is tired give him a baby to play with. He likes babies." Two thousand people came to E. J. Korvette's, on a rainy night, and, with the Brothers of the Nation of Islam milling around in the crowd, everything was serene and orderly.

Throughout the seventies, Morrison worked as a teacher at Yale, SUNY Purchase, Bard, Rutgers, and SUNY Albany. "Random paid about ten cents, so Toni took on teaching jobs," Jason Epstein recalled. In a 1998 interview, she said, "When I wanted a raise, in my employment world, they would give me a little woman's raise and I would say, 'No. This is really low.' And they would say, 'But,' and I would say, 'No, you don't understand. You're the head of the household. You know what you want. That's what I want. I want that. I am on serious busi-

ness now. This is not girl playing. This is not wife playing. This is serious business. I am the head of a household, and I must work to pay for my children."

"The Bluest Eye" had made the literary establishment take notice. In "Sula," which was published three years later, Morrison's little colored girls grew up and occupied a more completely rendered world. "The Bluest Eye" was divided by seasons; "Sula" was divided into years, stretching from 1919 to 1965. Again, the story is set in a small Ohio town, in a neighborhood called the Bottom. ("A joke. A nigger joke. That's the way it got started.") Sula Mae Peace, Morrison's heroine, is the progeny of an eccentric household run by formidable women. She leaves the Bottom in order to reinvent herself. Morrison does not relay what Sula does when she ventures into the world, but her return is catastrophic. (The first sign of impending disaster is a plague of robins.) Her return also brings about a confrontation with her grandmother Eva—a parable of the New Negro Woman confronting the Old World.

At Eva's house there were four dead robins on the walk. Sula stopped and with her toe pushed them into the bordering grass. . . . When Sula opened the door [Eva] raised her eyes and said, "I might have knowed them birds meant something. Where's your coat?"

Sula threw herself on Eva's bed. "The rest of my stuff will be on later."

"I should hope so. Them little old furry tails ain't going to do you no more good than they did the fox that was wearing them."

"Don't you say hello to nobody when you ain't seen them for ten years?"

"If folks let somebody know where they is and when they coming, then other folks can get ready for them. If they don't—if they just pop in all sudden like—then they got to take whatever mood they find."

"How you been doing, Big Mamma?"

"Gettin' by. Sweet of you to ask. You was quick enough when you wanted something. When you needed a little change or . . ."

"Don't talk to me about how much you gave me, Big Mamma, and how much I owe you or none of that."

"Oh? I ain't supposed to mention it?"

"OK. Mention it." Sula shrugged and turned over on her stomach, her buttocks toward Eva.

"You ain't been in this house ten seconds and already you starting something."

"Takes two, Big Mamma."

"Well, don't let your mouth start nothing that your ass can't stand. When you gone to get married? You need to have some babies. It'll settle you."

"I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself." . . .

"Pus mouth! God's going to strike you!"

"Which God? The one watched you burn Plum [Eva's son]?"

"Don't talk to me about no burning. You watched your own mamma. You crazy roach! You the one should have been burnt!"

"But I ain't. Got that? I ain't. Any more fires in this house, I'm lighting them!"

Where I come from, this dialogue doesn't sound so much fictional as documentary; it could be about the women—sisters and cousins—who passed Morrison's books on to me when I was growing up, women who didn't know they were "marginal."

Morrison's interest was in spoken language, heightened and dramatized. (Bob Gottlieb told me that he was always inserting commas into Morrison's sentences and she was always taking them out.) In describing her style, Morrison said, "I thought, Well, I'm going to drop 'g's where the black people dropped 'g's, and the white people on the same street in the same part of the state don't. But there was a distinction in the language and it wasn't in the spelling. It was someplace else." Morrison went on, "Maybe it's because African languages are so tonal, so that with the little shifts in pronunciation, the little shifts in placement, something else happens."

"I was just determined to take the language that for me was so powerfully metaphorical, economical, lunatic, and intelligent at the same time—just these short sentences or these developments of ideas that was the language of my family and neighbors and so on—and not make it exotic or comic or slumming." Zora Neale Hurston, the nineteen-thirties novelist and folklorist, was an example, Morrison said, of a black writer who treated dialogue as a transcript to show white people how it really was in the Florida swamps. Morrison's aim was different. "Street language is lyrical, plus it has this blend of the standard English and the sermonic, as well as the colloquial, you know—that is what I wanted to polish and show, and make it a literary vehicle," Morrison said. (She has succeeded in this to the point of irritating some readers. James Wood, in a review of "Paradise" titled "The Color Purple," wrote, "Morrison is so besotted with making poetry, with the lyrical dyeing of every moment, that she cannot grant characters their

own words. . . . She seems to view her people as mere spokes of style, who exist to keep her lyricism in motion.”)

Situating herself inside the black world, Morrison undermined the myth of black cohesiveness. With whiteness offstage, or certainly right of center, she showed black people fighting with each other—murdering, raping, breaking up marriages, burning down houses. She also showed nurturing fathers who abide and the matriarchs who love them. Morrison revelled in the complications. “I didn’t want it to be a teaching tool for white people. I wanted it to be true—not from outside the culture, as a writer looking back at it,” she said. “I wanted it to come from inside the culture, and speak to people inside the culture. It was about a refusal to pander or distort or gain political points. I wanted to reveal and raise questions.” She is still raising questions: Bill Cosey, the deceased patriarch in “Love,” is both beneficent and evil, a guardian and a predator.

Doing so, Morrison broke ranks—particularly with black male writers such as Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka, who were taking an increasingly militant stance against racism. Their attitude descended from the realistic portraits of black resistance in the novels of Wright, Baldwin, and Ellison—who, Morrison believed, were writing for a white audience. “The title of Ralph Ellison’s book was ‘Invisible Man,’” Morrison said. “And the question for me was ‘Invisible to whom?’ Not to me.” Morrison refused to present an ideal or speak in unison, even if it meant she was perceived as a traitor. “There is that sense of firm loyalty for black people,” she said. “The question is always, Is this going to be useful for the race?”

“I really liked that book,” one black woman told Morrison after reading “The Bluest Eye.” “But I was frustrated and angry, because I didn’t want you to expose us in our lives.” Morrison replied, “Well, how can I reach you if I don’t expose it to the world?” Others, myself included, accused her of perpetuating rather than dismantling the myth of the indomitable black woman, long-suffering and oversexed. In a book about real and fictional black women, I wrote that the obsessive “man love” of Hannah, Sula’s mother, was a stereotype. (At the time, I didn’t see that Morrison’s decision to burn her to death was a moral condem-

nation, not a melodrama.) Morrison is used to being challenged and isn’t afraid to confront her critics. “I didn’t like what you wrote,” she said to me a few years ago. I was caught off guard, but she steered the conversation to another topic.

The reviews of “Sula”—like those of “The Bluest Eye”—were mixed. Writing in *The Nation*, the critic Jerry H. Bryant came closest to identifying the confusion: “Most of us have been conditioned to expect something else in black characters, especially black female characters—guiltless victims of brutal white men, yearning for a respectable life of middle-class security; whores driven to their profession by impossible conditions; housekeepers exhausted by their work for lazy white women. We do not expect to see a fierceness bordering on the demonic.”

After “Sula,” Bob Gottlieb advised Morrison to move on. “‘O.K.,’ I told her, ‘that’s perfect. As perfect as a sonnet,’” he recalled. “‘You’ve done that, you don’t have to do it again. Now you’re free to open up more.’” She followed his advice with “Song of Solomon,” a sprawling epic about a prosperous but tortured black family that drew comparisons to Gabriel García Márquez’s “One Hundred Years of Solitude.” As she turned her attention to history—taking on, in years to come, slavery, Reconstruction, the great migration, the Harlem Renaissance—writing began to occupy more of her time. “I went to Bob Bernstein



twice,” she told me. “Once, when I saw a house I wanted to buy. I didn’t want to go through the whole black-woman thing—no man, no credit—and so I asked the company to get the mortgage for me. The second time was after ‘Tar Baby’ was published. I knew it was unorthodox, but I wanted to come into the office less. I was doing what the editors did—line editing—at home. It was such a waste of time to come in and drink coffee and gossip. So I started working one day a

week. I’d get eighty letters done, stay until eight o’clock, but get my work done.”

Eventually, she resigned. “The job at Random House was a life raft for her,” Gottlieb recalled. “She had two sons and she was worried about losing that life preserver. After she published ‘Tar Baby,’ I said, ‘Toni, you can depend on your writing to support you.’”

Morrison remembered Gottlieb’s telling her, “O.K. You can write ‘writer’ on your tax returns.”

Morrison provokes complicated responses from her literary progeny. She is routinely placed on a pedestal and just as frequently knocked off it. Black writers alternately praise her and castigate her for not being everything at once. With the deaths of Wright and Baldwin, Morrison became both mother and father to black writers of my generation—a delicate situation. (It’s similar to the phenomenon James Baldwin noted in his essay on Richard Wright: “His work was an immense liberation and revelation for me. He became my ally and my witness, and alas! my father.”) She spoke through her characters when we wanted her to speak to us. With every book, she loomed larger, and gave us more opportunities to define ourselves against her. In 1978, “Song of Solomon” won the National Book Critics Circle Award, beating out Joan Didion’s “A Book of Common Prayer” and John Cheever’s “Falconer.” It was chosen as a main selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club—the first by a black since Wright’s “Native Son.” When “Tar Baby” came out, four years later, Morrison was on the cover of *Newsweek*, the first black woman to appear on the cover of a national magazine since Zora Neale Hurston in 1943.

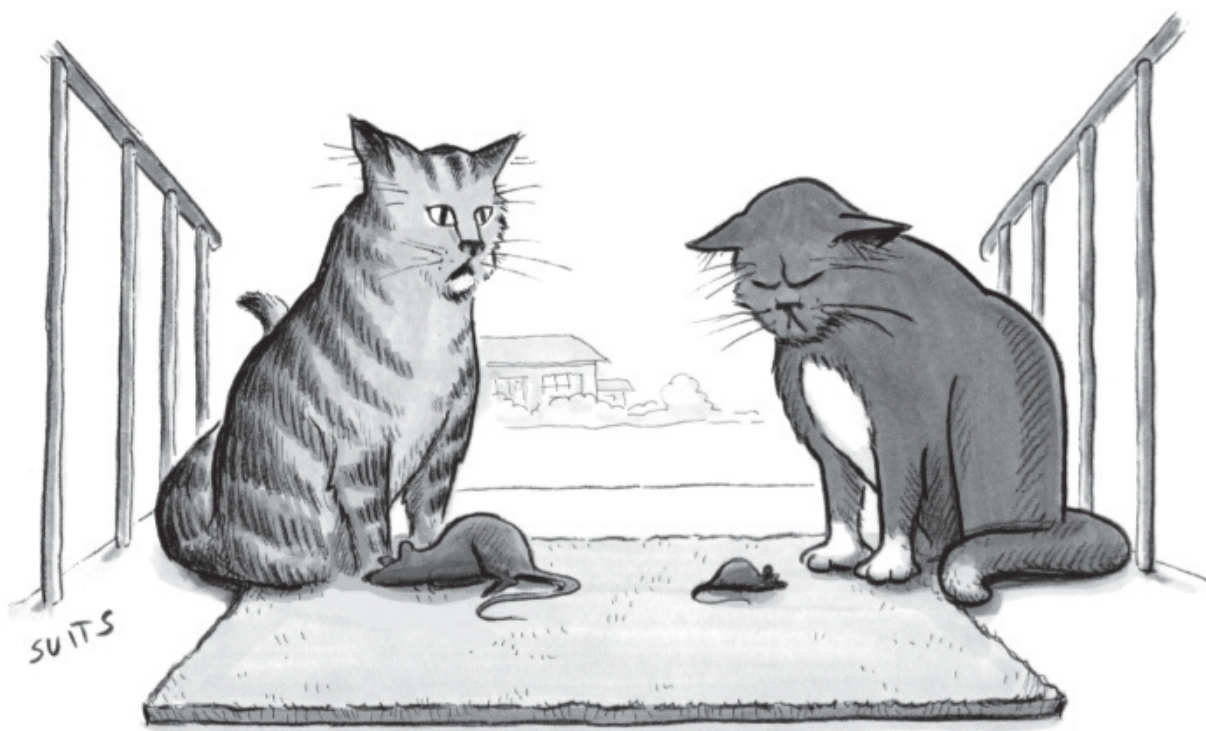
“Beloved,” too, was an instant sensation in 1987. It told the story of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who murders her child rather than allow it to be captured. When “Beloved” failed to be nominated for a National Book Award (Pete Dexter’s “Paris Trout” won that year), forty-eight prominent black intellectuals and writers, including Maya Angelou, Lucille Clifton, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Alice Walker, and Quincy Troupe, protested “against such oversight and harmful whimsy” in a statement that was printed in the *Times Book Review*. “Alive, we write this testament of thanks

to you, dear Toni: alive, beloved and persevering, magical. . . . For all America, for all of American letters, you have advanced the moral and artistic standards by which we must measure the daring and the love of our national imagination and our collective intelligence as a people.” They contested the fact that Morrison had yet to be considered for a Pulitzer Prize. Later that year, “Beloved” did win a Pulitzer. Ralph Ellison, for one, disapproved of the special pleading. “Toni doesn’t need that kind of support, even though it was well intentioned,” he said.

“Beloved”’s profile only got higher as time went by. The contrarian critic Stanley Crouch called it “protest pulp fiction” and complained that it idealized black behavior “to placate sentimental feminist ideology, and to make sure that the vision of black woman as the most scorned and rebuked of the victims doesn’t weaken.” He objected to its commerciality. “Were ‘Beloved’ adapted for television (which would suit the crass obviousness that wins out over Morrison’s literary gift at every significant turn) the trailer might go like this: ‘Meet Sethe, an ex-slave woman who harbors a deep and terrible secret that has brought terror into her home.’” (As it happened, it was adapted for film, with Oprah in the role of Sethe.)

Best-selling books, film adaptations, television talk-show appearances all increased Morrison’s celebrity and drew other famous people into her life. The actor Marlon Brando would phone to read her passages from her novels that he found particularly humorous. Oprah had her to dinner—on TV. By the time the film of “Beloved” was released, Morrison’s fame was inescapable. I recall walking along the West Side piers in Manhattan and hearing a Puerto Rican queen, defending one of her “children,” say to an opponent, “You want me to go ‘Beloved’ on your ass?”

Morrison’s critics reached their loudest pitch when she was awarded the Nobel Prize, in 1993, a year that Thomas Pynchon and Joyce Carol Oates had been favored to win. “I hope this prize inspires her to write better books,” Crouch said. Charles Johnson, a black novelist, called her writing “often offensive, harsh. Whites are portrayed badly. Men are. Black men are.” He said that she had been “the beneficiary of good



“Comparison is the thief of joy, Mittens.”

will” and that her award was “a triumph of political correctness.” A piece in the *Washington Post* asked well-known American writers whom they would like to see receive the award. Erica Jong (whose choice, Doris Lessing, Jong described as “the wrong kind of African: white”) wrote, “I wish that Toni Morrison, a bedazzling writer and a great human being, had won her prize only for her excellence at stringing words together. But I am nevertheless delighted at her choice. . . . I suspect, however, that her prize was not motivated solely by artistic considerations. Why can’t art in itself be enough? Must we also use the artist as a token of progressivism?” The Nobel Committee said that Morrison “delves into the language itself, a language she wants to liberate from the fetters of race.” To this, one critic retorted that she has “erected an insistent awareness of race (and gender and whatever else may be the ‘identity’-defining trait du jour) as the defining feature of the self.”

“I have never competed with other people,” Morrison told me. “It just never occurred to me. I have to sort of work it up to understand what people are talking about when they complain about what this person did or that person shouldn’t do. There were several contenders from the U.S. that year, and my wish was that they would’ve all gotten it, so that I could be left alone. I only

compete with myself, with my standards. How to do better the next time, how to work well.”

Near the end of one of our interviews last summer, Morrison took me on a tour of the house. Descending the staircase off the sitting room, we had a look at her office, with its two big desks stacked with paper and correspondence. Behind one desk was her assistant, John Hoppenthaler, a poet. Windows surrounded the room. “I don’t really write that much in here,” Morrison said. “Don’t look at it—it’s a mess.” She decided that she would pick some tomatoes for lunch. She is what she calls a “pot” gardener—she enjoys gardening on a small scale. The room below the office is where Morrison does her writing. It has a slate floor, a big wooden table—“It’s from Norway, not that I got it in Norway, and I’m sure the man who imported it overcharged for it, but I love all the grooves and cracks in it”—and a fully equipped kitchen. Sometimes she cooks Thanksgiving dinner for her family there (both sons are married, with children), but it’s a room meant for work. French doors lead out to a stretch of grass and the river beyond. Morrison got to work picking tomatoes off a small vine trained against a stone wall. Two tomatoes that did not meet her standards she chucked into the river. Then she led me inside to get back to work. ♦

PUBLIC NUISANCE

Larry Kramer, the man who warned America about AIDS, can't stop fighting hard—and loudly.

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

A long and vituperative essay appeared on the front page of the March 14, 1983, issue of a bi-weekly newspaper called the *New York Native*. The *Native* was the city's only significant gay publication at the time, and anything printed there was guaranteed to attract attention. This piece did considerably more than that. Entitled "1,112 and Counting," it was a five-thousand-word screed that accused nearly everyone connected with health care in America—officials at the Centers for Disease Control, in Atlanta, researchers at the National Institutes of Health, in Washington, doctors at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, in Manhattan, and local politicians (particularly Mayor Ed Koch)—of refusing to acknowledge the implications of the nascent AIDS epidemic. The article's harshest condemnation was directed at those gay men who seemed to think that if they ignored the new disease it would simply go away.

"If this article doesn't scare the shit out of you, we're in real trouble," its author, Larry Kramer, began. "If this article doesn't rouse you to anger, fury, rage and action, gay men have no future on this earth. Our continued existence depends on just how angry you can get. . . . Unless we fight for our lives we shall die." The piece became perhaps the most widely reprinted article ever published in a gay newspaper. "I am sick of closeted gay doctors who won't come out to help us fight. . . . I am sick of gay men who won't support gay charities. Go give your bucks to straight charities, fellows, while we die." He went on, "Every gay man who is unable to come forward now and fight to save his own life is truly helping to kill the rest of us."

Kramer was also sick of the way he was treated within New York's gay community. For years, the Greenwich Village and Fire Island swells had considered him a nebbishy interloper—a puritan

who often wondered in print why gay life had to be defined by sexual promiscuity rather than by fidelity or love. His views were routinely rejected. Gay men had battled hard for sexual freedom, and for many of them the unfettered pursuit of sex was exactly what that freedom was all about; they certainly didn't want to be told what to do with their bodies by a homosexual who seemed chronically unable to enjoy himself. In 1980, not long after Kramer's novel "Faggots" was published, the playwright Robert Chesley wrote, "Read anything by Kramer closely, and I think you'll find the subtext is always: the wages of gay sin are death." That was indeed a central theme of "Faggots," which appeared three years before AIDS, and which lampooned the sexual adventures of upper-middle-class gay New York. "Faggots" turned Kramer into a pariah. The book was removed from the shelves of New York's only gay bookstore, and he even found himself banned from the grocery near his vacation home on Fire Island. "I became a hermit for three years after that book was published," Kramer told me not long ago, still surprised by the condemnation he received from people he thought he was going to impress. "The straight world thought I was repulsive, and the gay world treated me like a traitor. People would literally turn their back when I walked by. You know what my *real* crime was? I put the truth in writing. That's what I do: I have told the fucking truth to everyone I have ever met."

That is one way to put it. Rodger McFarlane, a former lover, and a comrade in the AIDS wars from the beginning of the epidemic, suggested another: "When it comes to being an asshole, Larry is a virtuoso with no peer. Nobody can alienate people quicker, better, or more completely." "Faggots" has been attacked as coarse, prudish, and polemical, but it has sold something like a million copies, which places it high among

the best-selling works of gay fiction. "Faggots" has never been out of print. By the end of the book, Kramer had all but predicted the AIDS epidemic, just a few years before it would ruin his world.

At the time, people were too busy enjoying themselves to care. The late seventies and early eighties were a sexual Weimar in New York City. Cocaine and poppers were plentiful and excess was expected—particularly in the West Village. There was also an endless stream of activity in the bathhouses and along the rotting piers from Christopher Street to Chelsea, where gay men congregated by the score for the kind of obsessive and anonymous sex that Kramer warned could someday kill them. "How many of us have to die before *you* get scared off your ass and into action?" Kramer wrote in the *Native* piece. "Aren't 195 dead New Yorkers enough?" In his first article on the subject, published two years earlier and less widely read, Kramer noted, "If I had written this a month ago, I would have used the figure '40.' If I had written this last week I would have needed '80.' Today I must tell you that 120 gay men in the United States . . . are suffering from an often lethal form of cancer called Kaposi's sarcoma or from a virulent form of pneumonia that may be associated with it. More than thirty have died."

Twenty years later, with AIDS established as the worst epidemic in human history, with no cure, with as many as fifty million infected, and with people dying every day throughout the world in numbers that cannot easily be absorbed, Kramer's distant cries seem almost meek. Yet the fear that he unleashed helped transform gay life; men who had always insisted that the government stay out of their lives took to the streets by the thousand to demand vigorous federal intervention on their behalf. No longer was it enough to press for the repeal of sodomy laws; homosexuals

LARRY
KRAMER

PITTSBURGH

3 15 02



suddenly wanted benefits and protections that only Washington could provide.

Kramer's actions had even more profound effects: they helped revolutionize the American practice of medicine. Twenty-first-century patients no longer treat their doctors as deities. People demand to know about the treatments they will receive. They scour the Internet, ask for statistics on surgical success rates, and if they don't like what they hear they shop around. The Food and Drug Administration no longer considers approving a new drug until it has consulted representatives of groups who would use it. "In American medicine, there are two eras," Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, of the National Institutes of Health, told me. "Before Larry and after Larry." Fauci is the director of the N.I.H.'s program on infectious disease, and for twenty years he has been the most prominent voice in federal AIDS research. He has come to regard Kramer as a friend, but for many years he was one of Kramer's most vilified targets. "There is no question in my mind that Larry helped change medicine in this country," Fauci said. "And he helped change it for the better. When all the screaming and the histrionics are forgotten, that will remain."

It may prove difficult to think about Larry Kramer apart from his histrionics, however. What most people know about him they know from watching television, where ranting is his default mode of speech. Many of his stunts have become legend: for example, the time he stood in the street, megaphone in hand, screaming, "President Reagan, your son is gay!" The President's son always denied there was any truth to the assertion, but that didn't stop Kramer. ("I don't apologize for what I did to him," Kramer says. "I don't care what was true. We needed the attention. Ron Reagan's father was President for seven years before he said the word 'AIDS.'") Kramer helped come up with the idea, inspired by the artist Christo, to wrap Senator Jesse Helms's North Carolina home in a giant yellow condom. He also took part in a sustained assault on the late John Cardinal O'Connor that culminated on December 10, 1989, when thousands of protesters rallied at St. Patrick's Cathedral

during Mass; more than a hundred were arrested, including many who were carried outside on stretchers by police. ("Our greatest fucking day," Kramer told me, the exhilaration flooding back, years later. "Who could ever buy publicity like that?") Larry Kramer may be responsible for more public arrests than anyone since the height of the civil-rights movement: AIDS activists who tried to dump the ashes of a young friend onto the South Lawn of the White House; protesters who shut down the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, surrounded the Food and Drug Administration headquarters, and chained themselves to the gates at the headquarters of the pharmaceutical giant Hoffmann-La Roche and to the Golden Gate Bridge. In

1989, Kramer even called for riots before the annual international AIDS meeting convened in San Francisco. When Louis Sullivan, the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, delivered the closing address, he was pelted mercilessly with condoms.

Kramer came off as a weird mixture of Jerry Rubin and Mahatma Gandhi: three parts obnoxiousness and one part righteous indignation. He clearly loved infamy, though, and even his best friends wondered whether his untamed abrasiveness harmed their cause more than helped it. ("Everyone would always say, 'Oh, you went too far, you shouldn't have done that,'" Rodger McFarlane recalled not long ago. "What they didn't realize was that he would rehearse those outbursts for three straight hours. He would sit there and say, 'I am going on "Donahue" or the "Today" show and I am going to say the mayor is gay, because if I do *that* it's going to make things happen.' Nobody ever gives Larry credit for his showmanship.")

In 1985, at a fund-raiser in Washington, Kramer flung a glass of water in the face of Terry Dolan, a founder of the National Conservative Political Action Committee. Dolan was gay, but he kept it secret, and nothing infuriated Kramer more than men who enjoyed gay life privately but denied it in public. (After he was done with Dolan, Kramer promptly turned himself in to Liz Smith.) On a certain level, it was all theatre—heartfelt,

but theatre nonetheless. He was trained in the movie business, and he produced the AIDS epidemic as if it were a Biblical epic. Many people saw him simply as overwrought and egomaniacal—the AIDS movement's very own Norma Desmond. Not surprisingly, Kramer didn't care. "People need to talk about what you did if you want to make an impact," he told me recently. "Otherwise, why bother having a fit in the first place?"

In 1983, however, Kramer's crusade had barely begun, and it all seemed hopeless to him. "My sleep is tormented by nightmares and visions of lost friends, and my days are flooded by the tears of funerals and memorial services," he wrote in "1,112 and Counting," and he concluded with what would become a mordant trademark: a list of dead friends. He then urged "every gay person and every gay organization" to get ready for a new wave of civil disobedience.

"I will never forget the day that article appeared in the *Native*," Tony Kushner told me not long ago. In 1993, Kushner received a Pulitzer Prize for his play "Angels in America," which addressed the impact of AIDS on American society. "I was in graduate school at N.Y.U. in 1983, and I was in the second-floor lounge in the directing department." Stephen Spinella, who went on to perform the lead role of Prior Walter in Kushner's dark epic, was sitting across from him on a sofa. "I can still see him there," Kushner said. "He was wearing pink socks. I had just started coming out of the closet, and gay life seemed so exciting. By the time I finished the piece, I was literally shaking, and I remember thinking that everything I had wanted in my life was over. I was twenty-six years old and I didn't really have the strength to deal with what he was saying, but I had to acknowledge that we were faced with a biological event of an awesome magnitude—a genuine plague. People were beginning to drop dead all around us, and we were pretending it was nothing too serious. With that one piece, Larry changed my world. He changed the world for all of us."

People tend to remember their first encounter with Larry Kramer. I certainly remember mine. It was in 1986, and I was attending a public hearing at the Food and Drug Administration's



WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal,
providing you various content:
brand new books, trending movies,
fresh magazines, hot games,
recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price

Cheap constant access to piping hot media

Protect your downloadings from Big brother

Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages

Brand new content

One site



AVXLIVE.icu

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open <https://avxlive.icu>

headquarters, in the Washington suburbs. An advisory panel was considering whether to approve a new treatment for one of the more debilitating infections that AIDS can cause. Kramer, and many other activists, believed that the government was taking far too long to approve new treatments, and he was in the audience that day to say so. In front of several hundred people, he let loose a tirade against the "AIDS establishment," by which he meant the doctors, reporters, and politicians (among many others) who he believed were conspiring, through negligence, ill will, and sheer stupidity, to kill gay men. It was a typical Kramer tantrum, and I wasn't paying much attention until I heard him say my name, followed quickly by the words "Nazi" and "murderer." The AIDS epidemic was entering its most virulent phase in the United States, and I had just begun to cover it as a medical reporter for the *Washington Post*. Although Kramer reserved his most withering hatred for the *Times*, he was convinced that the *Post* (and nearly every other paper) was ignoring the severity of the epidemic largely because so many of those affected were gay.

I thought that Kramer was a complete lunatic. Over the years, however, I came to realize that he is not quite as emotional or as spontaneous as he appears. ("I don't walk around the streets of the Village screaming at my greengrocer, you know," he told me one day. "I am extremely shy. People, when they meet me, are always shocked that I'm not foaming at the mouth or shouting obscenities.") In fact, Kramer uses anger the way Jackson Pollock worked with paint; he'll fling it, drip it, or pour it onto any canvas he can find—and the bigger the canvas the more satisfied he is with the result. Subtlety repulses him. His novels, plays, and essays are filled with lists of enemies, hyperbolic cries of despair, and enough outrage to fill the Grand Canyon. His nonfiction work is collected in a volume called "Reports from the Holocaust," named, as Kramer told me, because "AIDS is genocide against our people. It's a more successful holocaust than Hitler could have imagined."

To straight America, Kramer has often seemed a radical gay extremist. The truth is more complex; Kramer oc-

cupies a strange niche in the history of activism. For years, he was reluctant to get involved with any political group, and then, when he did jump in, the groups were often reluctant to have him. "Larry is priceless, but he frightens people," said Sean Strub, an AIDS activist from the early days, who went on to start *POZ*, the first major magazine dedicated to people infected with H.I.V. "Fear is one of the most powerful motivational forces on earth, and it has been Larry's most effective ally. But his tactics and his style can be difficult to take. As a result, he was not always welcome, even when he was saving people's lives."

By the late nineteen-eighties, though, the streets of the Village and of the Castro, in San Francisco, seemed like a new kind of war zone; the buildings were intact, but everything else had been destroyed. Lovers, brothers, roommates,

and friends were dying by the hundred, and it was no longer possible for anyone to ignore.

Kramer's fame grew as the epidemic intensified. He wrote two autobiographical AIDS plays, "The Normal Heart" and "The Destiny of Me," which brought him equal measures of acclaim and controversy. "The Destiny of Me" was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize in 1993 (losing to "Angels in America"), and it won an Obie as the best play written that year. "The Normal Heart," which is generally viewed as a touchstone in the literature of AIDS, has been produced hundreds of times since it opened, in 1985, and it is the longest-running play ever staged at the Public Theatre. For the past two decades, Kramer has been at work on a manuscript called "The American People," an ambitious historical novel that begins in the Stone Age, includes, for example, details of Kramer's



"There's a nice little pasture two miles down the road that's open for lunch."

assertion that Abraham Lincoln was gay, and continues into the present. “He has set himself the hugest of tasks,” Will Schwalbe told me. Schwalbe, who is the editor-in-chief of Hyperion Books, will become Kramer’s literary executor. He is so far the only man to have read the entire manuscript, which he described to me as “staggering, brilliant, funny, and harrowing.”

Despite that, Larry Kramer will almost certainly be remembered above all as the signature activist of the age of AIDS. By the end of the eighties, he had started the two most effective AIDS advocacy organizations in America—both of them conceived in flashes of pure rage. Just after New Year’s Day in 1982, Gay Men’s Health Crisis was formed at a meeting in his Greenwich Village living room. Several years later, Kramer started the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power—more commonly known as ACT UP. Dozens of chapters were formed, from San Francisco to Bombay. Each was filled with desperate, aggressive, and often exceptional young men who, in the end, made Gay Men’s Health Crisis look like a sleepy chapter of the Rotary Club.

I had not seen Larry Kramer for nearly a decade when I visited him last fall at his country house, in northwestern Connecticut. It was an unusually warm afternoon, but Kramer, swaddled in Oshkosh overalls and a big woolly sweater, looked as if he might disappear into his clothes. Kramer has always seemed large and loud; in truth, he is only loud. He’s a slight man with dark, soulful eyes framed by wild and often unkempt eyebrows. His voice is unforgettable: like a shrill, high fog cutter. No matter how many times you have experienced it, and no matter how pleasant he means to be, when you pick up the telephone and hear the words “Hi, it’s Larry” it’s enough to startle a Delta Force commando.

When I arrived, though, Kramer could barely muster a whisper. He is sixty-six, and he believes that he has been infected with the AIDS virus since the late seventies. There was no test for H.I.V. until 1985, however, and it was only in 1988 that he stated publicly that he was infected. (“I took my first AZT in Barbra Streisand’s john,” he told me,

STILL-LIFE WITH POTATOES, PEARLS, RAW MEAT, RHINESTONES, LARD, AND HORSE HOOVES

In Spanish it’s *naturaleza muerta* and not life at all.
But certainly not natural. What’s natural?
You and me. I’ll buy you a drink.
To a woman who doesn’t act like a woman.
To a man who doesn’t act like a man.
Death is natural, at least in Spanish, I think.
Life? I’m not so sure.
Consider the Contessa, who in her time was lovely
and now sports a wart the size of this diamond.
So, *ragazzo*, you’re Venice.
To you. To Venice.
Not the one of Casanova.
The other one of cheap *pensiones* by the railway station.
I recommend a narrow bed stained with semen, pee, and sorrow
facing the wall.
Stain and decay are romantic.
You’re positively Pasolini.
Likely to dangle and fandango yourself to death.
If we let you. I won’t let you!
Not to be outdone, I’m Piazzolla.
I’ll tango for you in a lace G-string
stained with my first-day flow
and one sloppy tit leaping like a Niagara from my dress.
Did you say duress or dress?
Let’s sing a Puccini duet—I like “La Traviesa.”
I’ll be your trained monkey.
I’ll be sequin and bangle.
I’ll be Mae, Joan, Bette, Marlene for you—
I’ll be anything you ask. But ask me something glamorous.
Only make me laugh.
Another?
What I want to say, *querido*, is
hunger is not romantic to the hungry.
What I want to say is
fear is not so thrilling if you’re the one afraid.

with what sounded like pride.) Ever since that announcement, his death has been predicted, expected, and even, by some, awaited. Yet Kramer has watched as dozens, then scores, and finally hundreds of his friends and acquaintances have died. He long ago stopped attending their funerals. He still has his apartment in New York, but he prefers to spend his time at the country house, which was designed by his longtime lover, David Webster. It has a large open study, where Kramer writes, and where he has a view of a misty lake and rolling hills behind it. “The New York I love is gone now,” he told me. “The world of ‘Faggots’ that I found so intoxicating

is over. When I walk down the streets there, all I see are dead people.”

AIDS has never made Kramer particularly sick, which he attributes to a variety of superstitious and emotional causes. It is also a fact that the disease attacks some people more rapidly than others. Kramer knows that, but these days he is draped from neck to toe in turquoise. He wears a thick ring on nearly every finger, and he has pendants, bracelets, and other charms, too: “It’s silly. When I first came to New York, in 1957, after I got out of Yale, I went to a fortune-teller and she said, ‘You should always wear something turquoise; it will look after you and keep you healthy.’ As

What I want to say is
 poverty's not quaint when it's your house you can't escape from.
 Decay's not beautiful to the decayed.
 What's beauty?
 Lipstick on a penis.
 A kiss on a running sore.
 A reptile stiletto that could puncture a heart.
 A brick through the windshield that means I love you.
 A hurt that bangs on the door.
 Look, I hate to break this to you, but this isn't Venice or Buenos Aires.
 This is San Antonio.
 That mirror isn't a yard sale.
 It's a fire. And these are remnants
 of what could be carried out and saved.
 The pearls? I bought them at the Winn's.
 My mink? Genuine acrylic.
 Thank God this isn't Berlin.
 Another drink?
 Bartender, another bottle, but—
¡Ay caray! and oh dear!
 The pretty blond boy is no longer serving us.
 To the death camps! To the death camps!
 How rude! How vulgar!
 Drink up, honey. I've got money.
 Doesn't he know who we are?
Que vivan los de abajo de los de abajo,
los de rienda suelta, the witches, the women,
 the dangerous, the queer.
Que vivan las perras.
"Que me sirvan otro trago . . ."
 I know a bar where they'll buy us drinks
 if I wear my skirt on my head and you come in wearing nothing
 but my black brassiere.

—Sandra Cisneros

I have gotten sicker, I keep adding turquoise, so now I am basically a walking Sioux. But I am still here."

By any measure, that's a surprise, because about two and a half years ago Kramer started to die—not from AIDS but from end-stage liver disease caused by a long and debilitating bout of hepatitis B. Hepatitis, like H.I.V., is a viral infection that is often transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids. Not long before I arrived in Connecticut, doctors had told Kramer that his liver could not function for more than six months; the level of hepatitis B in his blood, which for infected but healthier people is measured in the thousands,

was close to the billions. But, after some months on an experimental drug called adefovir, which blocks the replication of the hepatitis virus in the body, Kramer had improved greatly. When I was with him, he was waiting—a beeper clipped to his overalls, fistfuls of pills by his bedside, and a charter plane on call—to be summoned to the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center for a liver transplant, a very risky operation that Dr. John Fung, the chief of transplant surgery there, had agreed to perform. Once Kramer got the call, he would have two hours to appear in the operating room. (After one false alarm, and the travel uncertainties caused by Sep-

tember 11th, Kramer moved to Pittsburgh, and rented an apartment five minutes from the hospital.)

Until recently, H.I.V. infection would have ruled out any hope of receiving a liver transplant; the waiting lists are long and the hope of success limited. Yet Fung, the forty-five-year-old surgeon who replaced the legendary Thomas Starzl as the chief of Pittsburgh's highly aggressive transplant unit, persisted. Nearly two dozen H.I.V.-positive patients had had the operation by the end of last year. Three have died; the rest are in various stages of recovery. Nonetheless, Kramer would be by far the oldest such patient to attempt the complicated surgery. There were also some touchy ethical issues to consider. Each year, more than twenty thousand people in America die while on waiting lists for organ transplants. Many people wondered why a relatively elderly person with H.I.V. disease was the right kind of candidate. ("There are a lot of crappy choices you have to make in life," Arthur Caplan, the director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania, told me. "Celebrity livers are among the worst. I am not saying he couldn't benefit; I just think other people could benefit more.")

When I met with Fung in Pittsburgh, he dismissed such concerns. "This isn't about celebrity; I didn't even know who Larry Kramer was when he walked in here," he told me. "Kramer has been on a waiting list for about a year." Fung is a boyish, bespectacled man who spends almost every waking hour in the operating theatre. "People with H.I.V. disease can live for many years after this surgery. That's my bottom line. To tell somebody he cannot be treated because he has a certain virus is not how American medicine works."

Two years ago, doctors told Kramer that he was too fragile to survive even anesthesia, let alone surgery. His weight had fallen from more than a hundred and sixty pounds to less than a hundred and thirty. His stomach was often grotesquely distended from fluid that had accumulated there. Judy Falloon, who works with Fauci at the N.I.H., recommended gambling on adefovir as a last chance to bring his virus under control. (At higher doses, it had proved toxic for many AIDS patients.) Kramer

asked few questions about it, and Falloon was amazed at how docile her new patient was. "He does nothing like what you might expect," she told me. "He doesn't yell. He doesn't scream. He is not even involved to the extent that is desirable." Still, she convinced Kramer that the drug was his only route to a transplant, and a transplant was his only chance to live.

Kramer struggled to get back in shape. The day I was with him in Connecticut, an ex-Marine drill instructor stopped by to work out with him in a gym he had installed in the basement. He ate as if he were making a serious run at the Tour de France—weighing every morsel of food so that he could be sure to get the most energy out of each calorie. As Kramer inched his way up the waiting list, the possibility of death no longer seemed remote. "Somehow I never thought it would be me," he said. "That is what my activism has always been about, really. Me. I wanted to live, and I expected to be saved." Now he wasn't so sure. Kramer told me tearfully that he wanted more time with

David Webster, and that he needed at least two more years to finish his book, which he feels will redeem him in the eyes of literary critics who he believes have often been unfair. He became agitated easily and on several occasions grew impatient with me because he didn't think I was paying enough attention to him. The events of September 11th had delayed my plans to visit, and Kramer had besieged me with e-mails suggesting that I was backing out, that I wasn't worthy and didn't understand the importance of his writing or his life. "I don't want a once-over-lightly character sketch with a few anecdotes about the more outrageous things I might have said or done," he wrote in one message. "You want to write something important about me that hasn't been written before, fine and great. Otherwise I don't think you're my man."

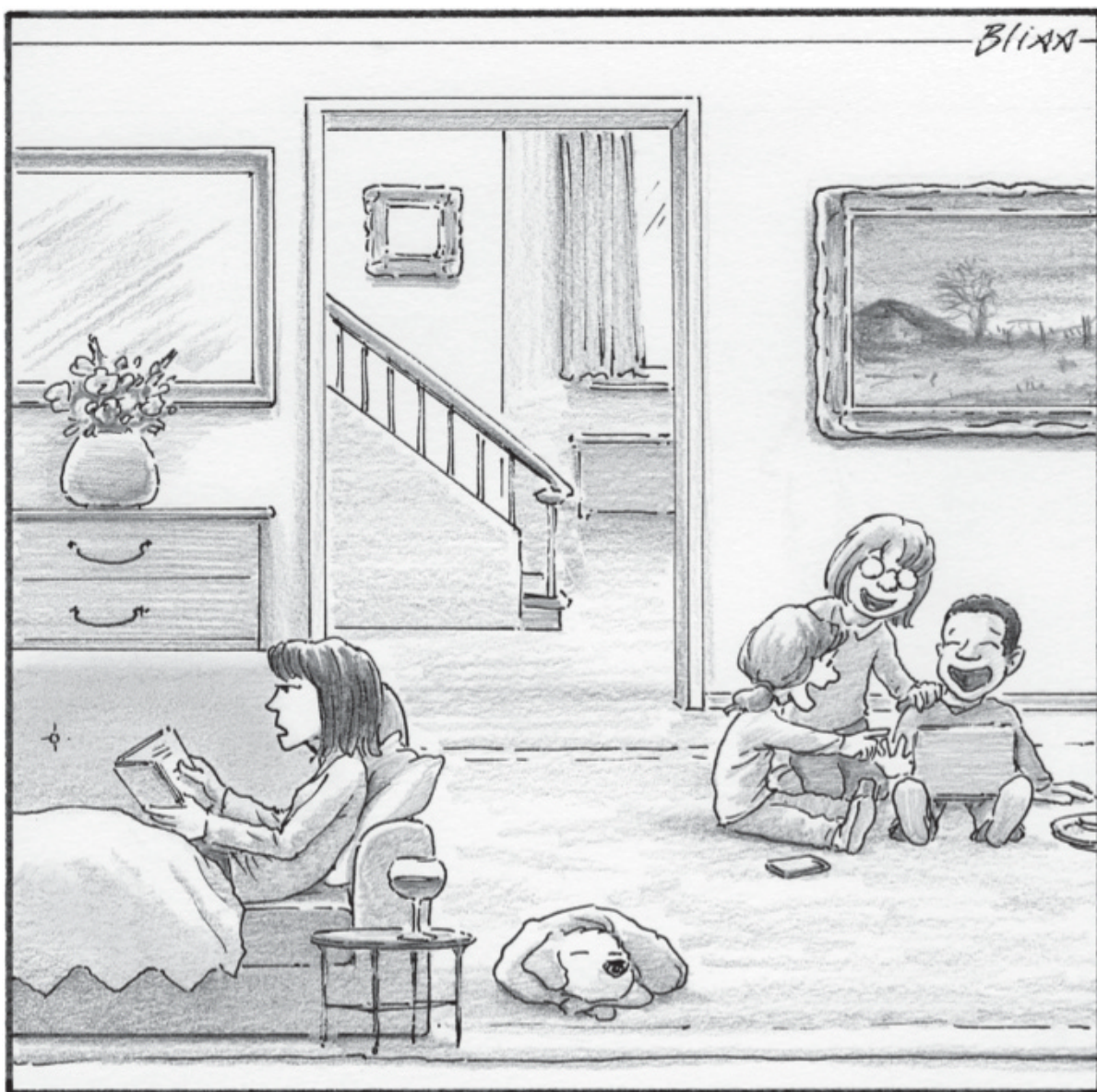
Larry Kramer was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1935. His grandparents on both sides ran grocery stores. He grew up mostly near Washington, D.C., the younger of two sons.

(His older brother, Arthur, is a successful lawyer in New York.) Kramer's father, George, was a government attorney who never hid his dislike for his younger son. "The first person who ever called me a sissy was my father," Kramer told me. "He called me that all the time. He would hit me and scream at me; he just couldn't stand what I had become." Kramer had a more complicated, but loving, relationship with his mother, Rea, who was a social worker for the Red Cross. He attended Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington, which was the best public school in the city. Kramer intended to go to Harvard, but when his father saw the application lying on the dining-room table he ripped it in two, saying that no son of his was going there. George Kramer was a Yale man. Larry's brother Arthur was a Yale man. "And, God damn it, I was going to be one, too," Kramer recalled.

He felt even more detached and alone at Yale than he had in Washington, and in 1953, his freshman year, after a suicide attempt in which he swallowed two hundred aspirin (and then called the campus police), he told his brother that he was gay. Arthur helped find him a psychiatrist. ("He tried to change me back from being a fag," Kramer recalled. "That was what they did then.") After Yale, he was required to enlist in the Army, where he and some other friends were assigned to work on Governors Island. "It was a lark," he said, because they were able to visit Manhattan every week. It was the end of the nineteen-fifties, a time of bohemian pleasure in the Village, and the true beginning of his gay life.

Kramer had been in the Glee Club at Yale, and it helped confirm a decision to make a living on or around the stage. After the Army, he got his first job, as a messenger in the mail room at the William Morris Agency in New York. He earned thirty-five dollars a week. "God, how I loved that job," he told me one day. "You could read everybody's mail. I read each teletype, and I knew how much Frank Sinatra was making in Vegas. I knew who was fucking whom. It was an unbelievable dream for a guy like me."

Kramer answered an ad in the *Times* for a "motion-picture trainee," which turned out to be a job running another



"Kids, use your inside-for-who-the-#!@-knows-how-long voice, please."*

teletype machine, at Columbia Pictures. He was going to turn it down until he was told that the room was across from the president's office and that only the top executives sent or received messages. He took the job, and stayed for nearly a year. He then began to study acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse, which was run by Sanford Meisner. Sydney Pollack was teaching there at the time, and, while fond of Kramer, he was blunt about his acting prospects: "He told me I was very good, but that I would never get the girl."

By 1960, Kramer was back at Columbia, working as a script reader in the New York office. Kramer impressed Mo Rothman, who was in charge of the studio's European business, and in 1961 he was invited to set up a story department in London. "Those were the golden years for film in London," he said. "I was able to witness and be a part of some of the greatest films of my time: 'Dr. Strangelove,' 'Lawrence of Arabia,' 'Guns of Navarone.'" In 1965, he learned that David Picker, the president of United Artists, was looking for an assistant in New York. Kramer got the job but immediately regretted it. "It was extremely boring and I missed London. But you couldn't just quit on David Picker unless you were ready to leave the business for good."

"I told him that I wanted to go back to England and make movies. He agreed to send me as an associate producer on a film called 'Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush.' The script was dreadful, and there was no way the film was going to get made; to save my job, I sat down and rewrote the screenplay. Picker liked it and the movie was back on." In 1966, the director Silvio Narizzano, who had just completed "Georgy Girl," told Kramer that he wanted to make a film of the D. H. Lawrence novel "Women in Love," and he invited him to produce it. Kramer read the book, optioned it from the Lawrence estate for fifteen hundred pounds, and hired the British playwright David Mercer to write a screenplay. "It was a horrible Marxist tract," Kramer said. "Just horrible. I had no script and no more money for another writer. So, once again, out of desperation, I sat down and wrote one myself." Picker liked Kramer's script enough to back the film; Kramer asked Peter Brook and Stanley Kubrick, among oth-

ers, to direct; eventually, Ken Russell said yes. The movie, which was made for a little more than a million dollars, was nominated for four Academy Awards, one of which was for Kramer's sexually explicit screenplay. (He lost to Ring Lardner, Jr., for "M*A*S*H.")

Kramer was thirty-four years old at the time, and his unexpected success helped establish him in Hollywood. He went there in 1970 and wrote the screenplay for the musical of "Lost Horizon,"



which turned into the "Ishtar" of its day. ("It was the one thing I have done in my life that I truly regret," Kramer told me. "People still laugh about it.") Nonetheless, he was paid nearly three hundred thousand dollars for his work—an enormous sum at the time. Kramer gave the money to his brother, who invested it so well that Kramer never had to rely on a paycheck again (and is now wealthy). He decided to write about gay life, and by the middle of the nineteen-seventies he was back in New York, working on "Faggots" and looking for something exciting to happen.

Early in 1982, there was still no name for the disease that was beginning to spread among homosexuals in New York and Los Angeles; it was often referred to as GRID (gay-related immune deficiency), because its prevalence among heterosexuals in Africa was largely unknown. "The Normal Heart" recounts the story of the beginnings of the epidemic in New York, as seen through one angry man's eyes. Kramer's battles with Mayor Koch, the city of New York, the *Times*, his ambivalence about his brother (to whom he is now close), his furtive love affair with a once married (and now dead) man were all up on the stage each day for more than a year. So was his growing disgust with the gay community. Kramer had never been a joiner; still, in January of 1982 he arranged a meeting at his apartment and made a point of in-

cluding attractive, successful men—not the fringe crowd that so often fills radical groups. After listening to some dark theories and the grim facts, one of the men at that first meeting, Paul Rapoport, said, "Gay men certainly have a health crisis on their hands," at which point Kramer shouted, "That's it! That's our name!"

It turned out to be one of the most important political gatherings of the era. "I walked into that very first meeting in Larry's apartment, which overlooked Washington Square Park, where there were friends and strangers," Rodger McFarlane told me. "And I watched Larry Kramer call a room full of grown, wealthy, accomplished men a bunch of pathetic fucking sissies to their faces, and it was astonishing. I thought he so fundamentally and so viscerally believed that he was right and that we could fix it and I fell madly and hopelessly for him."

G.M.H.C. set up the first AIDS hot line in the world, which within days was swamped by calls. Kramer was thrilled by the excitement of it all, yet he clashed with the other volunteers, and in particular with a closeted banker and former Green Beret named Paul Popham, who emerged as the first president of the organization. From the start, there was tension over their different approaches to the city, to gay life, and, especially, to Mayor Koch. Popham didn't want to antagonize the Mayor; Kramer detested Koch and, as the epidemic spread, he seemed to hold him personally responsible.

Not long ago, I visited Koch at his law office near Rockefeller Center. He hasn't changed any more than Kramer has: still ready to battle over the most minuscule of issues. In many ways, they were the perfect couple: two morally certain Jews from Greenwich Village (with, ironically, apartments in the same building on lower Fifth Avenue). Koch's law office is filled with pictures of friends and accomplices: Al D'Amato, Cardinal O'Connor, even the Pope—not exactly Kramer's crowd. Koch told me that he hoped Kramer would survive, and he called him a "genius" for starting G.M.H.C. and ACT UP. But that is pretty much where the compliments ended. "He blames *me* for the deaths of his friends," Koch said, shouting the word "me" loud enough to startle his secretary. "I just looked at the figure



today. It's something like forty or fifty million people have H.I.V. I'm responsible? I mean, people who know they shouldn't fuck without a rubber and nevertheless do—I'm responsible for that?"

Koch continued, "His position is that the reason I didn't want to see him at the beginning of the epidemic or have anything to do with AIDS is that people would think I was gay and it would injure my reputation. That is such bullshit: I have a record on this issue that goes back to the year Gimel. There has never been anybody else that has such a record. . . . For Kramer, it doesn't make a difference whether you are a friend of his or not. Ultimately, he attacks you, and he seeks to destroy you. He is brilliant. I say that without reservation. But he is deadly."

Koch did say that he regretted not having met with Kramer in the early days of the epidemic. When I told Kramer that, he spat; he still loathes Koch and takes delight in his own childish rudeness toward him. "One day after he was out of office, I was in the lobby getting the mail and suddenly I looked up and Ed Koch was standing in the lobby right

in front of me. He was trying to pet my dog Molly and he started to tell me how beautiful she was. I yanked her away so hard she yelped, and I said, 'Molly, you can't talk to him. That is the man who killed all of Daddy's friends.'"

Kramer alienated virtually everyone: he even publicly attacked Rodger McFarlane, one of his closest friends. Kramer's eruptions were too much for the emotionally burdened people of Gay Men's Health Crisis; he constantly threatened to quit, and, finally, when his anger boiled over at not being included in a long-sought meeting with Koch, his offer was accepted by the board.

"My lowest moment was at a get-together at a gay bar of all the G.M.H.C. volunteers," Kramer said. "It was a social thing at a place called Uncle Charlie's South. I knew the d.j. I got myself into his booth and I took the microphone. I said, 'This is Larry Kramer. I started this organization and I want to return and they won't let me and you must make them take me back.' I was screaming. I said they were cowards.

"It went down like a ton of lead. Peo-

ple looked at me like I was pathetic. That was when I got bitter. It seemed to me that everybody was just lining up to die. Rodger maintains it was my subconscious talking because I wanted to go away and write 'The Normal Heart.' But I should have kept my power base. I went from coming home and my answering machine had fifty messages to coming home and there was nothing. Before, people listened to my anger because I was Larry Kramer of G.M.H.C. Then, in one day, I was just nobody."

Kramer's most furious journey—the founding of ACT UP—began in 1987, after a visit to an AIDS hospital in Houston. By chance, he was scheduled to deliver a speech the following week at New York's Lesbian and Gay Community Center, on West Thirteenth Street. "That day, or the day before, there had been an article in the *Times* about two thousand Catholics who marched on Albany because they weren't getting something they wanted," Kramer recalled. "And I said to these people, that night, 'How can two thousand Catholics go to Albany and you are dying and you can't even get off your asses except to go to the gym?' And for the first time I did my famous shtick"—something he would repeat, with undiminished effect, for years. "I said, 'O.K., I want this half of the room to stand up.' And they did. I looked around at those kids and I said to the people standing up, 'You are all going to be dead in five years. Every one of you fuckers.' I was livid. I said, 'How about doing something about it? Why just line up for the cattle cars? Why don't you go out and make some fucking history?'"

Two weeks later, a piece by Kramer appeared on the *Times* Op-Ed page—arguing that the F.D.A. was the biggest obstacle to developing new drugs. Some of those who had heard Kramer's speech decided to demonstrate on Wall Street. The crowds were huge, and Burroughs Wellcome quickly cut the price of AZT, which at the time was the only drug available to treat the virus itself. "We got going on a real high," Kramer recalled. "What was interesting about ACT UP and a main reason for its success was that everyone was really getting scared. The people getting AIDS were all the cool people, the men who were all part of the scene. Good-looking hot guys.

Instead of going to the bars, you went to an ACT UP meeting." Those meetings became the essential event of the week in the Village. The numbers of people attending quickly grew from a few dozen to a few hundred. "Finally, we were having a thousand people at each meeting," Kramer said, "and we had to move to Cooper Union. The motto plastered over half the walls in New York was 'Silence = Death,' and we were ready to start shouting."

It is difficult to overstate the impact of ACT UP. The average approval time for some critical drugs fell from a decade to a year, and the character of placebo-controlled trials was altered for good. The National Institutes of Health even recognized ACT UP's role in getting drugs to more people earlier in the process of testing; soon changes in the way AIDS drugs were approved were adopted for other diseases, ranging from breast cancer to Alzheimer's.

"Before AIDS and before ACT UP, all experimental medical decisions were made by physicians," Anthony Fauci said one afternoon this winter, when I visited him at the N.I.H. campus. "Larry, by assuring consumer input to the F.D.A., put us on the defensive at the N.I.H. He put Congress on the defensive over appropriations. ACT UP put medical treatment in the hands of the patients. And that is the way it ought to be."

ACT UP's success did nothing to mellow Kramer; on the contrary, it seemed to validate his approach. In speeches, in public appearances, and in writing, he put forth two views of the universe: his own and that of the liars, Nazis, and murderers who opposed him. (When Yale refused to accept his papers and a large donation to create a chair in gay studies, Kramer accused officials there of every crime from homophobia to Nazism. Not until 1997, when the university agreed to accept a million dollars from Kramer's brother and establish the Larry Kramer Initiative for Lesbian and Gay Studies, did he back off.) Today, he says that such tactics were always necessary; others aren't so sure. "If you call someone who is not doing enough in some bureaucracy a murderer, what do you do when somebody is stabbing someone in the street?" the writer Andrew Sullivan asks. Sullivan is gay, H.I.V.-positive, and conservative. "Once

you debase the currency of language, how do you have somebody take you seriously? Can everyone be evil all the time? Is everyone a Nazi?"

There were also problems with the ACT UP approach to distributing medicine. Easing federal regulations was necessary. But scores of drugs were made available and used widely before they had been tested long enough for scientists to know if they would ever work. (And, if they did work well, it was impossible in such a short trial period to assess the way they interacted with other medications or how long their benefits would last.) Nonetheless, the speedy new timetable changed the course of the epidemic in countries rich enough to supply those drugs. Sophisticated antiretroviral medicines now make AIDS a chronic but relatively manageable disease for hundreds of thousands of Americans.

Kramer's tendency to look for the dark side prevents him from finding much value in this. "Kids don't see the dangers of AIDS anymore. It's not that they don't care, but they know they are not going to fall over dead quite as fast as we fell over dead. I am seen again as a prude. I always will be." It is true that just a few years ago a bathhouse opened down the street from G.M.H.C.; in some places, particularly in San Francisco and Miami, there are even groups—Sex Panic is the best known among them—that argue that gay men spend too much time worrying about public health and not enough about their sexual rights. It is also true that AIDS is no longer an absolute death sentence, and that has, naturally, caused people to relax their vigilance. These days, once again, Kramer finds himself attacked more often by the left—and the gay world—than by conservatives. "I see the statistics suggesting that drug resistance is increasing, that young men are getting infected at higher rates and ignoring safe sex, and it makes me feel like I wasted my life. These kids better learn how to scream, because being sweet won't work. That much I know. Honey doesn't get you a fucking thing."

Last December 21st, a forty-five-year-old man from Allegheny County, in Pennsylvania, died of a brain embolism. Within a few hours, Kramer was in the operating room, ready to receive

his liver. The surgery lasted thirteen hours, and afterward I heard only disquieting reports from the team at the University of Pittsburgh. The operation was more complicated than expected, Kramer was in critical condition (which is natural after transplant surgery), and it would be a while before anyone could tell how he would do. Then a headline was sent out by one of the wire services: "AIDS ACTIVIST LARRY KRAMER DIES."

The story itself, however, stated that Kramer seemed to be doing fine. The headline was one of those mistakes you get to cherish and put on your office wall. Before it could be retracted, however, tens of thousands of people got the news that Kramer had died. In fact, Kramer was out of intensive care in days and walking in less than a week, and by New Year's Eve he was calling to wish me well. He will remain in Pittsburgh for at least another month, while the doctors balance the complicated mixture of drugs required to keep his H.I.V. in check with the drugs needed to keep his body from rejecting the new liver. (When I told him I didn't think I would be back there before writing this article, he responded immediately, by e-mail, in capital letters: "HOW CAN YOU WRITE ABOUT ME IF YOU HAVEN'T EVEN SEEN MY SCAR?")

He has bad days, but his recovery has been rapid. To see that, I have to only look at my in-box—he can fire off dozens of e-mails an hour. The doctors took out his last tube in April. Lately, he has been working on his novel again and dreaming of returning home to New York and, especially, Connecticut. But, increasingly, he has been talking about the shortage of organs in the United States and how "politicians don't take it seriously and what an incredible outrage it is for somebody to die because they can't figure out a system in this country to supply organs." The tempo of questions has quickened as his health improved: Did I know how many goddam organs are just tossed into the ground each year, killing people, killing hope? Did I know that in many other countries you are presumed to be a donor unless you opt out? Here it is the opposite. "Somebody needs to be fighting about this," Kramer told me not long ago on the telephone. "Somebody needs to just get up and explode." ♦

The Lottery

Shirley Jackson

The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green. The people of the village began to gather in the square, between the post office and the bank, around ten o'clock; in some towns there were so many people that the lottery took two days and had to be started on June 26th, but in this village, where there were only about three hundred people, the whole lottery took only about two hours, so it could begin at ten o'clock in the morning and still be through in time to allow the villagers to get home for noon dinner.

The children assembled first, of course. School was recently over for the summer, and the feeling of liberty sat uneasily on most of them; they tended to gather together quietly for a while before they broke into boisterous play, and their talk was still of the classroom and the teacher, of books and reprimands. Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones, and the other boys soon followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones; Bobby and Harry Jones and Dickie Delacroix—the villagers pronounced this name “Del-lacroy”—eventually made a great pile of stones in one corner of the square and guarded it against the raids of the other boys. The girls stood aside, talking among themselves, looking over their shoulders at the boys, and the very small children rolled in the dust or clung to the hands of their older brothers or sisters.

Soon the men began to gather, surveying their own children, speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes. They stood together, away from the pile of stones in the corner, and their jokes were quiet and they smiled rather than laughed. The women, wearing faded house dresses and sweaters, came shortly after their menfolk. They greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip as they went to join their husbands. Soon the women, standing by their husbands, began to call to their children, and the children came reluctantly, having to be called four or five times. Bobby Martin ducked under his mother's grasping hand and ran, laughing, back to the pile of stones. His father spoke up sharply, and Bobby came quickly and took his place between his father and his oldest brother.

The lottery was conducted—as were the square dances, the teen-age club, the Halloween program—by Mr. Summers, who had time and energy to devote to civic activities. He was a round-faced, jovial man and he ran the coal business, and people were sorry for him, because he had no children and his wife was a scold. When he arrived in the square, carrying the black wooden box, there was a murmur of conversation among the villagers, and he waved and called, “Little late today, folks.” The postmaster, Mr. Graves, followed him, carrying a three-legged stool, and the stool was put in the center of the square and Mr. Summers set the black box down on it. The villagers kept their distance, leaving a space between themselves and the stool, and when Mr. Summers said, “Some of you fellows want to give me a hand?,” there was a hesitation before two men, Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, came forward to hold the box steady on the stool while Mr. Summers stirred up the papers inside it.

The original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago, and the black box now resting on the stool had been put into use even before Old Man Warner, the oldest man in town, was born. Mr. Summers spoke frequently to the villagers about making a new box, but no one liked to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box. There was a story that the present box had been made with some pieces of the box that had preceded it, the one that had been constructed when the first people settled down to make a village here. Every year, after the lottery, Mr. Summers began talking again about a new box, but every year the subject was allowed to fade off without anything's being done. The black box grew shabbier each year; by now it was no longer completely black but splintered badly along one side to show the original wood color, and in some places faded or stained.

Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, held the black box securely on the stool until Mr. Summers had stirred the papers thoroughly with his hand. Because so much of the ritual had been forgotten or discarded, Mr. Summers had been successful in having slips of paper substituted for the chips of wood that had been used for generations. Chips of wood, Mr. Summers had ar-

gued, had been all very well when the village was tiny, but now that the population was more than three hundred and likely to keep on growing, it was necessary to use something that would fit more easily into the black box. The night before the lottery, Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves made up the slips of paper and put them into the box, and it was then taken to the safe of Mr. Summers' coal company and locked up until Mr. Summers was ready to take it to the square next morning. The rest of the year, the box was put away, sometimes one place, sometimes another; it had spent one year in Mr. Graves' barn and another year underfoot in the post office, and sometimes it was set on a shelf in the Martin grocery and left there.

There was a great deal of fussing to be done before Mr. Summers declared the lottery open. There were the lists to make up—of heads of families, heads of households in each family, members of each household in each family. There was the proper swearing-in of Mr. Summers by the postmaster, as the official of the lottery; at one time, some people remembered, there had been a recital of some sort, performed by the official of the lottery, a perfunctory, tuneless chant that had been rattled off duly each year; some people believed that the official of the lottery used to stand just so when he said or sang it, others believed that he was supposed to walk among the people, but years and years ago this part of the ritual had been allowed to lapse. There had been, also, a ritual salute, which the official of the lottery had had to use in addressing each person who came up to draw from the box, but this also had changed with time, until now it was felt necessary only for the official to speak to each person approaching. Mr. Summers was very good at all this; in his clean white shirt and blue jeans, with one hand resting carelessly on the black box, he seemed very proper and important as he talked interminably to Mr. Graves and the Martins.

Just as Mr. Summers finally left off talking and turned to the assembled villagers, Mrs. Hutchinson came hurriedly along the path to the square, her sweater thrown over her shoulders, and slid into place in the back of the crowd. “Clean forgot what day it was,” she said to Mrs. Delacroix, who stood next to

her, and they both laughed softly. "Thought my old man was out back stacking wood," Mrs. Hutchinson went on, "and then I looked out the window and the kids was gone, and then I remembered it was the twenty-seventh and came a-running." She dried her hands on her apron, and Mrs. Delacroix said, "You're in time, though. They're still talking away up there."

Mrs. Hutchinson craned her neck to see through the crowd and found her husband and children standing near the front. She tapped Mrs. Delacroix on the arm as a farewell and began to make her way through the crowd. The people separated good-humoredly to let her through; two or three people said, in voices just loud enough to be heard across the crowd, "Here comes your Mrs., Hutchinson," and "Bill, she made it after all." Mrs. Hutchinson reached her husband, and Mr. Summers, who had been waiting, said cheerfully, "Thought we were going to have to get on without you, Tessie." Mrs. Hutchinson said, grinning, "Wouldn't have me leave m'dishes in the sink, now, would you, Joe?," and soft laughter ran through the crowd as the people stirred back into position after Mrs. Hutchinson's arrival.

"Well, now," Mr. Summers said soberly, "guess we better get started, get this over with, so's we can go back to work. Anybody ain't here?"

"Dunbar," several people said. "Dunbar, Dunbar."

Mr. Summers consulted his list. "Clyde Dunbar," he said. "That's right. He's broke his leg, hasn't he? Who's drawing for him?"

"Me, I guess," a woman said, and Mr. Summers turned to look at her. "Wife draws for her husband," Mr. Summers said. "Don't you have a grown boy to do it for you, Janey?" Although Mr. Summers and everyone else in the village knew the answer perfectly well, it was the business of the official of the lottery to ask such questions formally. Mr. Summers waited with an expression of polite interest while Mrs. Dunbar answered.

"Horace's not but sixteen yet," Mrs. Dunbar said regretfully. "Guess I gotta fill in for the old man this year."

"Right," Mr. Summers said. He made a note on the list he was holding. Then he asked, "Watson boy drawing this year?"

A tall boy in the crowd raised his

hand. "Here," he said. "I'm drawing for m'mother and me." He blinked his eyes nervously and ducked his head as several voices in the crowd said things like "Good fellow, Jack," and "Glad to see your mother's got a man to do it."

"Well," Mr. Summers said, "guess that's everyone. Old Man Warner make it?"

"Here," a voice said, and Mr. Summers nodded.

A sudden hush fell on the crowd as Mr. Summers cleared his throat and looked at the list. "All ready?" he called. "Now, I'll read the names—heads of families first—and the men come up and take a paper out of the box. Keep the paper folded in your hand without looking at it until everyone has had a turn. Everything clear?"

The people had done it so many times that they only half listened to the directions; most of them were quiet, wetting their lips, not looking around. Then Mr. Summers raised one hand high and said, "Adams." A man disengaged himself from the crowd and came forward. "Hi, Steve," Mr. Summers said, and Mr. Adams said, "Hi, Joe." They grinned at one another humorlessly and nervously. Then Mr. Adams reached into the black box and took out a folded paper. He held it firmly by one corner as he turned and went hastily back to his place in the crowd, where he stood a little apart from his family, not looking down at his hand.

"Allen," Mr. Summers said. "Anderson. . . . Bentham."

"Seems like there's no time at all between lotteries any more," Mrs. Delacroix said to Mrs. Graves in the back row. "Seems like we got through with the last one only last week."

"Time sure goes fast," Mrs. Graves said.

"Clark. . . . Delacroix."

"There goes my old man," Mrs. Delacroix said. She held her breath while her husband went forward.

"Dunbar," Mr. Summers said, and Mrs. Dunbar went steadily to the box while one of the women said, "Go on, Janey," and another said, "There she goes."

"We're next," Mrs. Graves said. She watched while Mr. Graves came around from the side of the box, greeted Mr. Summers gravely, and selected a slip of paper from the box. By now, all through the crowd there were men holding the

small folded papers in their large hands, turning them over and over nervously. Mrs. Dunbar and her two sons stood together, Mrs. Dunbar holding the slip of paper.

"Harburt. . . . Hutchinson."

"Get up there, Bill," Mrs. Hutchinson said, and the people near her laughed. "Jones."

"They do say," Mr. Adams said to Old Man Warner, who stood next to him, "that over in the north village they're talking of giving up the lottery."

Old Man Warner snorted. "Pack of crazy fools," he said. "Listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for *them*. Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work any more, live *that* way for a while. Used to be a saying about 'Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon.' First thing you know, we'd all be eating stewed chickweed and acorns. There's *always* been a lottery," he added petulantly. "Bad enough to see young Joe Summers up there joking with everybody."

"Some places have already quit lotteries," Mrs. Adams said.

"Nothing but trouble in *that*," Old Man Warner said stoutly. "Pack of young fools."

"Martin." And Bobby Martin watched his father go forward. "Overdyke. . . . Percy."

"I wish they'd hurry," Mrs. Dunbar said to her older son. "I wish they'd hurry."

"They're almost through," her son said.

"You get ready to run tell Dad," Mrs. Dunbar said.

Mr. Summers called his own name and then stepped forward precisely and selected a slip from the box. Then he called, "Warner."

"Seventy-seventh year I been in the lottery," Old Man Warner said as he went through the crowd. "Seventy-seventh time."

"Watson." The tall boy came awkwardly through the crowd. Someone said, "Don't be nervous, Jack," and Mr. Summers said, "Take your time, son."

"Zanini."

After that, there was a long pause, a breathless pause, until Mr. Summers, holding his slip of paper in the air, said, "All right, fellows." For a minute, no one moved, and then all the slips of paper were opened. Suddenly, all the

women began to speak at once, saying, "Who is it?" "Who's got it?" "Is it the Dunbars?" "Is it the Watsons?" Then the voices began to say, "It's Hutchinson. It's Bill," "Bill Hutchinson's got it."

"Go tell your father," Mrs. Dunbar said to her older son.

People began to look around to see the Hutchinsons. Bill Hutchinson was standing quiet, staring down at the paper in his hand. Suddenly, Tessie Hutchinson shouted to Mr. Summers, "You didn't give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn't fair!"

"Be a good sport, Tessie," Mrs. Delacroix called, and Mrs. Graves said, "All of us took the same chance."

"Shut up, Tessie," Bill Hutchinson said.

"Well, everyone," Mr. Summers said, "that was done pretty fast, and now we've got to be hurrying a little more to get done in time." He consulted his next list. "Bill," he said, "you draw for the Hutchinson family. You got any other households in the Hutchinsons?"

"There's Don and Eva," Mrs. Hutchinson yelled. "Make *them* take their chance!"

"Daughters draw with their husbands' families, Tessie," Mr. Summers said gently. "You know that as well as anyone else."

"It wasn't *fair*," Tessie said.

"I guess not, Joe," Bill Hutchinson said regretfully. "My daughter draws with her husband's family, that's only fair. And I've got no other family except the kids."

"Then, as far as drawing for families is concerned, it's you," Mr. Summers said in explanation, "and as far as drawing for households is concerned, that's you, too. Right?"

"Right," Bill Hutchinson said.

"How many kids, Bill?" Mr. Summers asked formally.

"Three," Bill Hutchinson said. "There's Bill, Jr., and Nancy, and little Dave. And Tessie and me."

"All right, then," Mr. Summers said. "Harry, you got their tickets back?"

Mr. Graves nodded and held up the slips of paper. "Put them in the box, then," Mr. Summers directed. "Take Bill's and put it in."

"I think we ought to start over," Mrs. Hutchinson said, as quietly as she could.

"I tell you it wasn't *fair*. You didn't give him time enough to choose. *Everybody* saw that."

Mr. Graves had selected the five slips and put them in the box, and he dropped all the papers but those onto the ground, where the breeze caught them and lifted them off.

"Listen, everybody," Mrs. Hutchinson was saying to the people around her.

"Ready, Bill?" Mr. Summers asked, and Bill Hutchinson, with one quick glance around at his wife and children, nodded.

"Remember," Mr. Summers said, "take the slips and keep them folded until each person has taken one. Harry, you help little Dave." Mr. Graves took the hand of the little boy, who came willingly with him up to the box. "Take a paper out of the box, Davy," Mr. Summers said. Davy put his hand into the box and laughed. "Take just *one* paper," Mr. Summers said. "Harry, you hold it for him." Mr. Graves took the child's hand and removed the folded paper from the tight fist and held it while little Dave stood next to him and looked up at him wonderingly.

"Nancy next," Mr. Summers said. Nancy was twelve, and her school friends breathed heavily as she went forward, switching her skirt, and took a slip daintily from the box. "Bill, Jr.," Mr. Summers said, and Billy, his face red and his feet overlarge, nearly knocked the box over as he got a paper out. "Tessie," Mr. Summers said. She hesitated for a minute, looking around defiantly, and then set her lips and went up to the box. She snatched a paper out and held it behind her.

"Bill," Mr. Summers said, and Bill Hutchinson reached into the box and felt around, bringing his hand out at last with the slip of paper in it.

The crowd was quiet. A girl whispered, "I hope it's not Nancy," and the sound of the whisper reached the edges of the crowd.

"It's not the way it used to be," Old Man Warner said clearly. "People ain't the way they used to be."

"All right," Mr. Summers said. "Open the papers. Harry, you open little Dave's." Mr. Graves opened the slip of paper

and there was a general sigh through the crowd as he held it up and everyone could see that it was blank. Nancy and Bill, Jr., opened theirs at the same time, and both beamed and laughed, turning around to the crowd and holding their slips of paper above their heads.

"Tessie," Mr. Summers said. There was a pause, and then Mr. Summers looked at Bill Hutchinson, and Bill unfolded his paper and showed it. It was blank.

"It's Tessie," Mr. Summers said, and his voice was hushed. "Show us her paper, Bill."

Bill Hutchinson went over to his wife and forced the slip of paper out of her hand. It had a black spot on it, the black spot Mr. Summers had made the night before with the heavy pencil in the coal-company office. Bill Hutchinson held it up, and there was a stir in the crowd.

"All right, folks," Mr. Summers said. "Let's finish quickly."

Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones. The pile of stones the boys had made earlier was ready; there were stones on the ground with the blowing scraps of paper that had come out of the box. Mrs. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands and turned to Mrs. Dunbar. "Come on," she said. "Hurry up."

Mrs. Dunbar had small stones in both hands, and she said, gasping for breath. "I can't run at all. You'll have to go ahead and I'll catch up with you."

The children had stones already, and someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles.

Tessie Hutchinson was in the center of a cleared space by now, and she held her hands out desperately as the villagers moved in on her. "It isn't fair," she said. A stone hit her on the side of the head.

Old Man Warner was saying, "Come on, come on, everyone." Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers, with Mrs. Graves beside him.

"It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed, and then they were upon her. ♦



THE CRITICS



BOOKS APRIL 1, 2013

AN UNFINISHED WOMAN

The desires of Margaret Fuller.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

In May of 1850, after four years abroad, Margaret Fuller set sail from Livorno to New York, bound for her native Massachusetts. She was just about to turn forty, and her stature in America was unique. In the space of a decade, she had invented a new vocation: the female public intellectual. Fuller's intelligence had dazzled Ralph Waldo Emerson, who invited her to join the Transcendental Club and to edit its literary review, *The Dial*. She was considered a "sibyl" by the women who subscribed to her "Conversations," a series of talks on learned subjects (Greek mythology, German Romanticism) whose real theme was female empowerment. In 1844, Horace Greeley, the publisher of the *New-York Tribune*, had recruited Fuller to write a front-page column on culture and politics (the former, mandarin; the latter, radical). A year later, she published "Woman in the Nineteenth Century," a foundational work of feminist history. When Fuller left for Europe, in 1846, to write for Greeley from abroad, she became the first American foreign correspondent of her sex and, three years later, the first combat reporter. She embedded herself in the Italian independence movement, led by her friend Giuseppe Mazzini, and she filed her dispatches from the siege of Rome while running a hospital for wounded partisans.

Despite her fame, however, Fuller had always just eked out a living. So, after the fall of the short-lived Roman Republic, she had to borrow the money for a cheap ticket home on the *Elizabeth*, an American merchantman. The route was perilous—vessels were lost every

year—but Fuller's passage was a gamble for other reasons, too. After a lifetime of tenacious celibacy, this "strange, lilt-ing, lean old maid," as Thomas Carlyle described her, had taken a lover.

One of Rome's eternal stories is that of the bookish spinster from a cold clime, whose life has its late spring in Italy, and who loses her inhibitions, amid the ruins, with a man like Giovanni Ossoli. Fuller's paramour was a Roman patrician, ten years her junior. Her friends described him as dark, slender, and boyish-looking, with a melancholy air and fine manners, but he also struck them as a nonentity. He and Fuller had met by chance, in St. Peter's Square, and embarked on a romance that even she considered "so every way unfit." Ossoli had a "great native refinement," as Fuller advertised it to her mother, but he was virtually penniless and barely literate. He spoke no English, and had no profession. It seems unlikely that their love would have endured; Fuller doubted it herself. But early in their affair she found herself pregnant, and they were now sailing home as a couple—"the Marchese and Marchesa Ossoli" (no marriage certificate has ever been found)—with their twenty-month-old son, Nino.

After two months at sea, on July 19th, with land in sight, the *Elizabeth* was caught in a violent hurricane that devastated the Atlantic seaboard. It ran aground on a sandbar off Fire Island, only a few hundred yards from the beach. Several crew members made it to shore, and, as the hull foundered, the captain saved himself, abandoning his passengers. Fuller was last seen on the deck, her hair lashed by the gale. Then she

was felled by the mast, and disappeared in a swell, shrouded by her white nightdress. Her husband had refused to leave her; neither body was ever recovered. Nino drowned in the arms of a steward.

Margaret Fuller was once the best-read woman in America, and millions knew her name. Her writing and her correspondence have been readily available for almost forty years, and she is a rock star of women's-studies programs. Yet a wider public hungry for transgressive heroines (especially those who die tragically) has failed to embrace her.

Few writers, however, have been luckier in their biographers, beginning, in 1884, with Thomas Higginson, best known as the friend in need of Emily Dickinson, who helped to revive interest in Fuller after decades of neglect. She was resurrected for a second time by Bell Gale Chevigny, who published "The Woman and the Myth: Margaret Fuller's Life & Writings" in 1976, just as the second wave of feminism was cresting. This monument of research and commentary, revised in 1994, is the bedrock of modern Fuller scholarship. In 2007, Charles Capper completed the two-volume "Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life," which has never been surpassed as a social history of the period. The Fuller canon was enriched last year with another superb biography, by John Matteson, "The Lives of Margaret Fuller." (Matteson won a Pulitzer Prize in 2008 for his biography of Louisa May Alcott and her father, Bronson.) And this month Megan Marshall joins the cohort of distinguished Fullerites



Fuller circa 1850. She had invented a new vocation: the female public intellectual.

with “Margaret Fuller: A New American Life” (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

Marshall is a gifted storyteller steeped in the parochial society of nineteenth-century Boston and Concord—a world of souls at “a white heat.” (The expression was Fuller’s before it was Dickinson’s; the poet is said to have loved Fuller’s work.) Her previous book was an enthralling group portrait, “The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism.” “Ignited” is perhaps going too far, but the Peabodys helped to fan the inflammatory changes in attitudes and thought that produced transcendentalism, Brook Farm, Thoreau’s “Walden,” Fuller’s “Conversations” (most of which were hosted by the eldest sister, Elizabeth), and the novels of Sophia Peabody’s husband, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

There is not much that is materially “new” in Marshall’s life, beyond a letter from Emerson and some engravings that belonged to Fuller, which survived the shipwreck, and which the author discovered in the course of her research. But there are many ways of doing justice to Fuller, and Marshall makes an eloquent case for her as a new paradigm: the single career woman, at home in a world of men, who admire her intelligence, though it turns them off; and the seeker of experience, who doesn’t want to miss out on motherhood, yet is terrified that it will compromise her work life. In Marshall’s biography, the focus is on the drama of identity that Fuller improvised on the world stage, and on the modern anatomy of her desires—a mind and body ever at odds. Capper’s book bests Marshall’s in thoroughness, Matteson’s in elegance and dispassion, and Cheigny’s in tough-mindedness, but Marshall excels at creating a sense of intimacy—with both her subject and her reader.

As is often the case, the most popular life of Fuller, “The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli,” is also the most sentimental. In 1852, it was the favorite book in America, until “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” usurped its place as the No. 1 best-seller, and it continued to outsell all other biographies for the next four years. “The Memoirs” is a posthumous Festschrift—an anthology of texts and reminiscences—cobbled together by three grief-stricken friends of Fuller’s:

Emerson, William Henry Channing, and James Freeman Clarke (the latter two were liberal clergymen). Their provisional title, “Margaret and Her Friends,” tells you something about an impulse that Fuller often aroused, particularly in her male contemporaries: to normalize her. Men, Emerson observed, felt that Margaret “carried too many guns.” Edgar Allan Poe succinctly defined that anxiety when he divided humankind into three categories: men, women, and Margaret Fuller. Her friends intended to praise her, though, in effect, they buried her—morally prettified and embalmed, hands folded piously over her bosom. They took it upon themselves to censor or sanitize the searing emotions of her journals and letters, and to rewrite quotes that might, they feared, tarnish her respectability—especially in the light of her dubious marriage. Emerson had, in fact, urged Fuller to stay abroad with Ossoli and the baby, while a disheartening number of her familiars were of the opinion that a tragedy was preferable to an embarrassment. “Providence,” according to Nathaniel Hawthorne, “was, after all, kind in putting her, and her clownish husband, and their child, on board that fated ship.”

“Mary Wollstonecraft,” Fuller wrote, “like Madame Dudevant (commonly known as George Sand) in our day, was a woman whose existence better proved the need of some new interpretation of woman’s rights than anything she wrote.” The same could be said of Fuller. She was born in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, in 1810, the eldest of her parents’ eight children. Her mother, Margaret, was a docile, sweet-natured beauty who embodied the feminine ideal. She was a decade younger than her husband, Timothy, a lawyer, educated at Harvard, who later had a career in politics. Higginson describes him and his four brothers as “men of great energy, pushing, successful,” and without “a particle of tact” among them. Margaret was her father’s daughter.

Mrs. Fuller lost her next child, Julia, when Margaret was three. Both parents were disconsolate and, at around this time, Timothy began to homeschool the precocious little girl who seemed to share his drive. “He hoped,” Fuller wrote,

“to make me the heir of all he knew.” She was reading at four, and writing charmingly at six, when Timothy started her on Latin. “To excel in all things should be your constant aim,” Timothy exhorted her. This regime continued, with escalating demands and standards and an increasingly advanced curriculum, until Margaret was nine, when she was sent to school.

Fuller later attributed her “nervous affections”—she was subject to nightmares and sleepwalking in her youth, migraines and depressions in her maturity—to the despotism of her father’s tutelage, and some of her more zealous partisans have accused him of child abuse. Timothy was a patriarch of his time, miserly with his approval, which Margaret desperately sought. Yet his ambitions for her—ambitions he never had for his sons—incubated her singularity. So did the romance of an intense shared pursuit that excluded her mother. In her own mythology, Fuller figures as Minerva, the goddess of wisdom who sprang from her father’s head. And in “Woman in the Nineteenth Century” she calls her idealized alter ego Miranda:

Her father was a man who cherished no sentimental reverence for woman, but a firm belief in the equality of the sexes. . . . He addressed her not as a plaything but as a living mind.

Shakespeare’s Miranda beguiles a prince at first sight. Fuller’s Miranda, she writes, “was fortunate in a total absence of those charms which might have drawn to her bewildering flatteries, and in a strong electric nature, which repelled those who did not belong to her, and attracted those who did.” A great deal of heartache is thus subsumed.

Margaret was a strapping girl who preferred boys’ strenuous activities to girls’ decorous ones. But she stopped growing at puberty—her height was average—and her appetite caught up with her. She was described as “very corpulent,” and some kind of skin condition, probably acne, spoiled her complexion. Severe myopia gave her a squint that was aggravated by her voracious reading. She compensated for a curved spine by walking with her head thrust forward, “like a bird of prey.” Her nasal voice was easy to mock, and, from her school days on, Fuller was the kind of obnoxious know-it-all—brusque, sar-

castic, and self-important—who invites mockery. A good deal of her showing off was the bravado of a misfit. She was humiliated when only nine guests came to a party for which she had sent out ninety invitations. She made up her mind, she wrote, to be “bright and ugly.” Her journals are full of insecurity and, at times, anguish. George Eliot found one passage in particular “inexpressibly touching”: “I shall always reign through the intellect, but the life! the life! O my God! shall that never be sweet?”

Timothy’s prodigious daughter would have excelled at Harvard, but no college in America accepted women. In Margaret’s case, however, the obstacles that she faced seem only to have whetted her appetite for overturning them. “I have felt a gladiatorial disposition lately,” she wrote as a young woman to a schoolmistress. In 1830, she embarked on a course of independent study with a childhood friend, James Freeman Clarke, her future biographer. She set out to learn German, the language of Goethe, and was able to translate him within three months. Once Goethe became her master, Emerson wrote, “the place was filled, nor was there room for any other.”

Clarke was not the only platonic friend, man or woman, toward whom Fuller had romantic feelings. These infatuations followed a pattern. A desirable person would be drawn to Fuller’s “ebullient sense of power,” as Emerson described her charisma. She would fantasize about a mystical union that was, in principle, chaste. In the case of a man, a utopian marriage of equals was usually part of the scenario. In the case of a woman, the two of them might, as was the custom of the time, share a bed. These amorous friendships informed Fuller’s prescient notion of gender as a bell curve—the idea that there are manly women, womanly men, and same-sex attractions, all of which would be considered perfectly natural in an enlightened society. But sooner or later her needy ardor would cause the relationship to cool, and the fickle “soul mate” would jilt her for a more suitable partner. It was an “accursed lot,” Fuller concluded, to be burdened with “a man’s ambition” and “a woman’s heart,” though the ambition, she wrote elsewhere, was “absolutely needed to keep the heart from breaking.”

It was Clarke who suggested, in 1832, that Fuller consider authorship as an outlet for her “secret riches within.” But she resented him for thinking her “fit for nothing but to write books.” In another century, she later wrote, she would have asked for an ambassadorship. Fuller did begin writing for publication in her mid-twenties, though she was, in a way, right about her inaptitude for a writer’s life. Patience and humility were alien to her. She loved flaunting her erudition in gratuitous digressions. Reading her was like spelunking, Clarke said. Lydia Maria Child likened Fuller’s style to having “too much furniture in your rooms.” Elizabeth Barrett Browning was one of many contemporaries who found Fuller’s prose “curiously inferior to the impressions her conversation gave you.” But the fairest critique of Fuller’s literary efforts may be her own of George Sand’s:

Her best works are unequal; in many parts hastily written, or carelessly. . . . They all promise far more than they perform; the work is not done masterly. . . . Sometimes she plies the oar, sometimes she drifts. But what greatness she has is genuine.

The year 1835 was a turning point in Fuller’s life: she made Emerson’s ac-

quaintance, and her father died, leaving the family in financial straits. It fell to Margaret to help support her widowed mother and her siblings, so she abandoned plans to write a Goethe biography and to travel abroad, and accepted a teaching job at Bronson Alcott’s experimental school, in Boston. The otherworldly Alcott neglected to pay her, however, so in 1837 Fuller became a schoolmistress in Providence. Her wages, thanks to rich patrons, were the annual salary of a Harvard professor, a thousand dollars. But striving to elevate the children of philistines was intolerable, and whenever she could she stayed with Waldo, as Emerson was called, and his put-upon wife, Lidian, at their manor in Concord. Her first visit lasted two weeks, and Waldo initially found his house guest conceited and intrusive. Two more discordant personalities—Waldo’s cool, cerebral, and ironic; Margaret’s noisy, histrionic, and sincere—would be hard to imagine. But, as the days wore on, her caustic wit made him laugh, and her conversation, he decided, was “the most entertaining” in America. By the time they parted, Matteson writes, Emerson was “rhapsodic.” Fuller’s presence, he gushed,



“Yeah, that’s right, I’m an ‘influencer.’ And I got some ‘curated’ recommendations for you.”

atypically, “is like being set in a large place. You stretch your limbs & dilate to your utmost size.”

Fuller was a passionate pedagogue—just not in the classroom. Alcott, who had also failed at teaching, reinvented himself profitably as a “conversationalist.” A “conversation” was an informal paid talk, in an intimate venue—a parlor rather than a hall—whose *raison d’être*, Matteson writes, was to unite the participants in “sympathetic communion around a shared idea.” Inspired by Alcott’s model, Fuller decided that she would offer a series of such talks, by subscription, to an all-woman audience, with the goals of challenging her “conversers” intellectually and also of giving them “a place where they could state their doubts and difficulties with hope of gaining aid from the experience or aspirations of others.” Many women, Marshall notes, “signed on just to hear Margaret Fuller talk,” and were too intimidated to join the discussion, but the “Conversations” that Fuller hosted in Boston between 1839 and 1844 have been called, collectively, the first consciousness-raising group.

By this time, Emerson had formed the intellectual society that came to be known as the Transcendental Club. The transcendence he espoused was a rejection of established religion in favor of a Romantic creed in which faith was “one thing with Science, with Beauty, and with Joy.” A soul liberated from blind obedience to Christian dogma would be free to follow its own dictates, and to seek a direct experience of divinity in art and nature. The transcendental “gospel” suffused Fuller’s “Conversations,” but in a more heretical form. She was encouraging women to become free agents not only in relation to a deity but in their relations with men.

The Dial was conceived at club meetings in 1839, and, when Margaret volunteered for the job of editor, Emerson gave it to her gladly. The editorship made, and still does, an impressive entry on Fuller’s résumé, especially if you have never read the actual publication. Emerson was dismayed by the cloying piety of the first issue. (Apart from Thoreau, Alcott, and Emerson,

the contributors are obscure today.) “I hope our *Dial* will get to be a little bad,” he told her.

After five years in the Concord hot-house—“this playground of boys, happy and proud in their balls and marbles,” as Fuller put it—she was ready for a worldlier adventure. In 1844, she moved to New York, to work for Greeley, and to live with him and his wife, Mary (an alumna of the “Conversations”), in Castle Doleful, their ramshackle mansion in Turtle Bay, near the East River. The Greeleys were teetotallers and health nuts, but liberal-minded about their house guest’s unchaperoned life. Fuller became a regular at the literary salon of Anne Charlotte Lynch, on Waverly Place, where she met Poe, and she patronized a mesmeric healer who supposedly cured her scoliosis. In the chapel at Sing Sing, on Christmas Day, she told an audience of convicted prostitutes that their “better selves” would guide them when they were released. The mistreatment of mental patients mobilized her vehemence, and she compared the humanity shown to the inmates of the Bloomingdale Insane Asylum (a dance was held on the evening she visited) to the wretched conditions of the lunatics on Blackwell’s (now Roosevelt) Island. Chevigny writes, “Her job as a reporter gave her access to worlds hitherto closed to a woman of her class.” But, she remarks, “liberal as her reportage was for the time, it was still eminently genteel muckraking: the Jew is subjected to age-old stereotyping, the poor to kindly pity.”



Fuller’s distaste for the Chosen People made an exception for James Nathan, a German-Jewish banker with taurine looks and literary ambitions whom she had met at Anne Lynch’s New Year’s party. Nathan, who was Fuller’s contemporary, was, in his way, as unlikely a match for her as Ossoli, and, Matteson writes, there was no logic to their relations. Love does not obey logic, however—particularly, perhaps, the love of a cerebral woman for a sensual man. Nathan had arrived in New York from Hamburg as a teen-ager, and had worked his way up from the rag trade to Wall Street. They shared a love for German;

Nathan sang lieder to her; they went to galleries, concerts, and lectures.

This artful courtship, which patrician Boston might have considered miscegenation, made Fuller feel “at home on the earth,” and she couldn’t believe it would suffer from an “untimely blight.” But the fact that she imagined the blight suggests that she was braced for its inevitability. Depending on whose story you believe (Matteson’s is the fairest to Nathan), the banker was simply caddish. He was using Fuller to befriend Greeley, and it came out that he was living with a working-class mistress. Yet, had Margaret’s relations with men not been so naïve, you would have to conclude that she led him on. Her letters dropped hints about an impure past. Their language was overheated. She frankly admitted her “strong attraction” to Nathan, and was coy about joining him on “the path of intrigue.” That path led to the banks of the East River, where, one evening, Nathan apparently made an advance from which Fuller recoiled in horror.

Her inchoate feelings for Nathan were not merely virginal. As she herself acknowledged, in forgiving him, they were “childish.” But perhaps they suggest why her writing was never as great as her ambitions for it. She could love and desire intensely, but rarely at the same moment, and she could think and feel deeply, but not often in the same sentence.

In August of 1846, Fuller sailed for England. She had dreamed of a trip abroad since adolescence, and a philanthropic Quaker couple, Marcus and Rebecca Spring, agreed to pay her expenses in exchange for her tutoring of their son. They tarried in the North for two months, visiting Wordsworth in the Lake District, and also one of his neighbors, a young poet just setting out on his career: Matthew Arnold. They continued to Scotland, where Fuller got lost while hiking on Ben Lomond, in the Highlands, and spent a night marooned, with nothing but the mist for a blanket. She transformed this ordeal, for her *Tribune* readers, into an experience of sublimity.

That October, the companions arrived in London, where Fuller’s reputation had preceded her. The English edition of “Woman in the Nineteenth Century” had just been published. In New York, Poe had written that Fuller “judges

woman by the heart and intellect of Miss Fuller, but there are not more than one or two dozen Miss Fullers on the whole face of the earth." George Eliot, after noting "a vague spiritualism and grandiloquence which belong to all but the very best American writers," continued:

Some of the best things [Miss Fuller] says are on the folly of absolute definitions of woman's nature and absolute demarcations of woman's mission. "Nature," she says, "seems to delight in varying the arrangements, as if to show that she will be fettered by no rule; and we must admit the same varieties that she admits."

Even before Fuller left New York, her columns had become more concerned with political engagement than with transcendence, and Europe pushed her further toward militance. Thomas Carlyle and his wife, Jane, had introduced her to Mazzini. She began to describe herself as a socialist. In Paris (where her principles did not forbid the acquisition of some elegant clothes, or a presentation at court), she met some of the radicals—Lamennais, Béranger, Considérant among them—who, as Chevigny puts it, were "preparing the explosion that in the next year would blast Louis Philippe off the throne." She had a thrilling encounter with George Sand after knocking on her door, unannounced. Unlike the "vulgar caricatures" of the libertine cross-dresser which even Fuller, to some degree, had accepted, Sand emerged from her library wearing a gown of sombre elegance, instead of her infamous trousers. She greeted Fuller with "lady-like dignity," and they spent the day in rapt discussion. A year earlier, Fuller had praised Sand for having "dared to probe" the "festering wounds" of her society, but she deplored the "surgeon's dirty hands." A woman of Sand's genius, she wrote, untainted by debauchery, "might have filled an apostolic station among her people." Now, she declared, Sand needed no defense, "for she has bravely acted out her nature."

The same could not yet be said of Margaret Fuller. A woman could be a sea captain, she had asserted; she could happily do the manual labor of a carpenter; there was no differential of capacity between the female brain and the male. But, ironically, Fuller herself needed a man's blessing to follow the example of Sand's sexual bravery.

That man, whom she met toward the



"I can't stop gardening."

end of her stay in Paris, was the great Polish poet and nationalist Adam Mickiewicz, a forty-eight-year-old exile with heroic features. Expelled from Poland for his political activities, he had lived for a while in Weimar, where he had met Goethe. His marriage was disastrous, and he had taken up with his children's governess. In Paris, Mickiewicz was gathering the forces for a revolution that would free Poland from Prussia, and he was a partisan of freedom in all its guises, including women's liberation. Keen to meet him on every count, Fuller had sent him a volume of Emerson's poems, "guessing correctly," Marshall writes, "that the gift would draw him swiftly" to her hotel. Mickiewicz had been dismissed from the Collège de France, in 1844, for lectures, influenced by transcendentalism, which preached a volatile mixture of mysticism and insurrection.

Fuller inevitably fell in love with Mickiewicz, and it seems, for once, to have been mutual. "He affected me like music," she told Rebecca Spring. But it also appears, from their letters, that he had recognized what vital element—not only sex but honesty about desire—was missing from Margaret's life. "The first step in your deliverance," he told her, "is to know if it is permitted to you to remain virgin."

Several days later, Fuller and the Springs left Paris for Rome. She felt bereft, not only of Mickiewicz but of all the time

that she had "wasted" on unworthy others. He had told her, however, that he wasn't yet free to give her what she deserved, which was "all of me." On Holy Thursday, she and her friends went to hear vespers in St. Peter's Square, and became separated. She was approached by a gallant young Italian who asked her if she was lost.

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," Simone de Beauvoir wrote in "The Second Sex," a hundred years after "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" was published. Although her assertion may not be true scientifically, Beauvoir was right in the sense that women are not born inferior but, rather, become inferior, by the process of objectification that she so exhaustively describes. Yet Beauvoir also knew that a woman "needs to expend a greater moral effort than the male" to resist the temptations of dependence.

Few women have fought more valiantly than Margaret Fuller to achieve autonomy. But her struggle required her to create and to endure a profound state of singleness. She had to become, she wrote, "my own priest, pupil, parent, child, husband, and wife." That austere self-isolation, perhaps, is why each new biography excites interest in her, which then subsides. Her example gives you much to admire but not enough to envy. ♦

HUNGER ARTIST

How Cesar Chavez disserved his dream.

BY NATHAN HELLER

The history of California is a history of will grafted onto the landscape. First came missionaries, building churches out of clay and meting out God's kingdom to the native peoples. Then came gold and silver, the pursuit of which levelled hills, remade cliffs, and built cities along the Pacific Coast. Water was diverted. Sprawling fields soon followed. By the time Cesar Chavez organized a grape workers' strike, in 1965, the agriculture business was the largest in the state. People say Chavez fought for justice, which is broadly true. And yet that strike, like many of his efforts, rose more from scrappy pragmatism than from any abstract ideal. "No one in any battle has ever won anything by being on the de-

fensive," he liked to tell his picketers. High intent was a fine thing, but change would come the way it always came in California: by force of will.

Chavez's own will was mammoth, and his battle against agribusiness lasted weeks, then months, then years. The goal, he said, was to cost growers fifty dollars for each dollar spent on the strike. Ostensibly, field workers were pushing for better wages and treatment. But they also fought for recognition of Chavez's new field-labor union, now called the United Farm Workers, and the political authority of a marginalized demographic. The strike, which began and was headquartered in Delano, a San Joaquin Valley town that lay at the heart of table-grape pro-

duction, grew to represent the fate of a new national cause.

Along the way, Chavez helped reinvent the picket. At one point, he shouted rallying cries over the fields from a low-flying airplane. At another, his colleagues founded a Teatro Campesino to perform skits on the backs of pickup trucks. The strike "appeared to have no kinship with the institutionalized formalities of most contemporary labor disputes," John Gregory Dunne wrote in his book "Delano" (1967). "There was no ritual of collective bargaining, no negotiating table around which it was difficult to tell the managers of money from the hewers of wood and the carriers of water, no talk of guidelines and fringe benefits and the national weal, no professional mediators, on leave from academe at a hundred dollars a day and all expenses paid, plugged in by special telephone lines to the Oval Room at the White House."

Instead, there were the pickets and a narrative of heroism that aroused a questing middle class. By late 1967, Chavez had launched a widespread



MICHAEL ROUGIER / GETTY

Chavez—photographed with R.F.K. in March, 1968, during a fast—grew vindictive, even paranoid, in his later years.

grape boycott. Soon union contracts started raining down. The victories of these years form the basis for a new movie, originally called “Cesar Chavez: An American Hero” (it has since lost its honorific subtitle), directed by Diego Luna and starring Michael Peña. The film, which was screened at the White House last month, was made under the gaze of Chavez’s family, and it draws out a familiar hagiography. “I’m going to see it all the way through,” Peña’s Chavez vows during one of several can’t-keep-a-good-man-down ruminations. “Because if we lose I won’t be able to look at my family in the eye.”

How honest is this portrait? Chavez was a cipher even to colleagues, partly because he didn’t seem to fit the role. He was short, with a dad-on-Sunday wardrobe and a gold-capped tooth. Many found him notably ineloquent—his verbal placeholder of choice was “golly”—and his counsel, when it came, could appear contradictory. In public, Chavez professed gentleness, but he had a quick, vindictive temper. As a leader, he was sometimes insupportable; as a parent, he had trouble showing up. (He skipped two of his children’s births and left his daughter’s wedding, for union business.) He was the most vexing kind of workaholic, the ascetic kind: hard-edged and self-punishing. Through most of his productive years, he seems to have subsisted largely on Diet Rite cola, matzoh, and prunes.

He often found himself on the wrong side of a decision. In “The Crusades of Cesar Chavez” (Bloomsbury), a provocative new biography, Miriam Pawel reassesses Chavez’s legacy under a raking light. For years, the foundational account of Chavez’s work was an as-told-to narrative by Jacques E. Levy, a deeply embedded writer who just as deeply admired the cause. Pawel, a former Los Angeles *Times* reporter, offers a corrective to that starry-eyed project. Her previous book, “The Union of Their Dreams” (2009), explored the United Farm Workers by focussing on its seconds-in-command. After speaking with those who helped build the union, Pawel had a critical read on many of Chavez’s moves.

Now she takes on the giant himself. “The Crusades of Cesar Chavez” combines fresh reporting with spot-

checking of Chavez’s memories, as gathered by writers such as Levy, and the result helps flesh out Chavez as more than a transcendent moral hero. As he once put it, “There is a big difference between being a saint and being an angel.”

From an early age, Chavez felt thrown out of the garden. He was born in 1927, in the North Gila Valley of Arizona, to a comfortable family of farmers. His grandfather had arrived there from Chihuahua and set up a thriving homestead. His father was a profligate businessman, though, and in the late thirties the county foreclosed on the property. Chavez, then twelve, watched a fleet of tractors tear the family’s horse corral apart.

The Chavezes had already started spending time in California, picking avocados in Oxnard, north of Los Angeles, and peas in Pescadero, up the coast. Chavez later claimed to have gathered wild mustard greens for food. The family settled in a garage in a destitute part of San Jose known as Sal Si Puedes (“Get Out If You Can”). In 1943, Chavez met a young woman named Helen Fabela at a malt shop in Delano, and when she became pregnant, five years later, they got married. Both had worked for lousy wages under the eyes of growers, and it was considered a coup, within the family, when Chavez and his brother got jobs hefting lumber, far from the farm’s indignities.

That changed. A few years earlier, in Los Angeles, an organizer named Fred Ross had started a Mexican-American-advocacy group called the Community Service Organization, devoted to small-scale activism: fighting racist establishments, helping with immigration forms, challenging deportations. When Ross came to San Jose to start a chapter, Chavez, then twenty-five years old, got involved, leaving his wife and four children at home each night to drum up members and register people to vote. Ross left, in 1953, and Chavez took over. Often, he’d work twelve to fifteen hours a day, tracing a circuit through the region’s agricultural capitals. Just as often, he would make this intense schedule known. “One of his little techniques has always been to shame people into doing something,”

Ross observed. “To let them know how hard he was working.” When his bosses decided to organize field workers in Oxnard, Chavez was sent to make it happen.

He quickly discovered that a major problem was the use of *braceros*: Mexican nationals imported temporarily to work in the fields, originally as an emergency measure during the Second World War. The supply of cheap foreign labor deprived native-born workers of leverage; Chavez gathered data on the program’s abuses and sent his findings to the right agencies. He helped to organize a strike and a march, making the TV news and forcing a wage increase. The *bracero* program came under scrutiny; Chavez was promoted to director of the national Community Service Organization.

By then, he had hit on a new project. Why not build a union for farmworkers? He had no doubt of the need. Since 1935, the National Labor Relations Act had set the framework for labor disputes in the United States. The law allowed collective bargaining in the private sector, providing for trade unions and strikes. Yet it did not apply to field workers—the exception had been politically necessary for Southern support—and, in the decades following, they’d accrued none of the benefits that other labor forces enjoyed. Salaries were depressed. Work-site housing was grim. Health care was virtually inaccessible.

In the spring of 1962, Chavez broke from the Community Service Organization and returned to Delano, where he printed registration cards for a “Farm Workers Association.” At that point, an aspiring union already existed in the California fields. Something called the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee had been chartered by the A.F.L.-C.I.O. in 1959 and was popular with Filipino-American farmworkers. Chavez, wanting to run his own operation, convened a meeting of a hundred and fifty workers and their families in Fresno on September 30, 1962. In a press release, he called himself a war veteran—he had worked on the Navy’s ship-repair team from 1946 to 1948—and announced the union’s founding. He became its general director and, by lunch, was joining in a chant of the new union’s slogan:

"Viva la causa!" The limits of this cause weren't spelled out, which left room as his ambitions grew.

Chavez's flagrant humility and asceticism were jujitsu-type moves. If disempowerment and overwork were all farmworkers had, then casting both as moral virtues elevated the terms of dispossession into marks of special strength. By the fall of 1964, the union had put down roots. It had a few hundred members, an insurance program, a credit union, and a newspaper. Chavez built slowly to retain control. "Cesar had studied the structure of the C.S.O., and he tried to correct its mistakes in his organization," Dolores Huerta, his long-term collaborator, told Peter Matthiessen for a two-part Profile of Chavez in *The New Yorker*, in 1969. (Matthiessen helped establish Chavez's national reputation, joining a flock of enthralled writers. According to Pawel, Matthiessen offered to buy Chavez a hot tub while reporting the article and ended up installing a nine-hundred-dollar heating system in a pool for his use; the writer later donated his payment to the union.)

When the first stirrings of a grape workers' strike arose, Chavez didn't want to join. A strike he'd led in the spring

of 1965 had been modest; the Delano grape fields were a behemoth, and he was afraid of getting in over his head. In September, though, Filipino farmworkers in the other union failed to show up for work, and growers tried to recruit Farm Worker members to replace them, forcing a response. Although Chavez worried that his union wasn't ready, he took a vote. His members unanimously voted to strike.

The confrontation that followed lasted for five years. When workers left the picket lines to take jobs elsewhere, urbanites and college kids took their places. When an amendment to the National Labor Relations Act came up for review in early 1966, Senator Robert F. Kennedy arrived for hearings and grilled the county sheriff, who had arrested strikers on flimsy pretexts, suggesting that the officer review the U.S. Constitution during his lunch break. Chavez was eager to take advantage of the spotlight, and the next morning he launched a march from Delano to Sacramento, some three hundred miles, under the slogan "*Peregrinación, penitencia, revolución*" ("Pilgrimage, penance, revolution").

The grape boycotts ramped up. Chavez merged his union with the Filipinos', a year into the strike, to create

the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. As his influence grew, so did political opposition. Governor Ronald Reagan called the strike "immoral" and snacked on grapes in public; President Richard Nixon later increased the Defense Department's grape purchases, tripling orders for Vietnam soldiers. (Chavez was ambivalent about the war—he refused to support his son's conscientious-objector application—but Nixon's move helped align the growers with an unpopular cause.) In 1968, Chavez began his first public fast, declining to eat for twenty-five days in "penance" and "prayer." Flyers read "He sacrifices for us!" It marked his transformation into something more than a labor organizer.

It also helped sear his image into public memory. In 1969, Chavez got a *Time* cover (not, as Luna's movie has it, a Man of the Year award). The strike officially ended in the summer of 1970, when Delano grape growers en masse agreed to sign contracts with the union. Most accounts fade to black with these victories. Dunne leaves the strike in 1967. Luna's film ends with the signing. Levy trails its aftermath to the mid-seventies. Pawel presses on, though, through the years beyond. Her story must be one of the strangest in the history of American labor.

A VERY FREUDIAN SLIP



As the union grew more influential, it got more complex. Before long, it was struggling to serve a membership of tens of thousands. Its contracts required workers to be chosen through a "hiring hall," by union seniority—a measure that caused strife, since some workers found themselves too junior to reclaim their regular gigs. Members had to pay dues even when they weren't working in California, and if the union called for them to skip work for a rally or a picket, they could lose seniority for noncompliance. Some wondered whether the new system was more hindrance than help. Growers bridled. Chavez's associates enjoined him to figure out something better than the hiring hall, and yet he seemed to resent the suggestion.

Despite the union's expansion, Chavez still did much of its work. "Though one of his great gifts was enlisting support, he delegated little, not trusting others to get the work done,"

Pawel writes. As early as the fifties, he'd kept records of his associates' failures and his disappointments. By the late sixties, his frustration was ingrained. He was beset by back pain, and he spoke of quitting. If he didn't leave, he explained, he'd need to toughen up to make things run. "I've got to become a real bastard," he said, in 1969. "Just go around and crack the whip and get people out of the union. In other words, I got to pull a Joseph Stalin, to really get it. And I don't think I want to do that. By the time I do that, then I'll be a different man."

He didn't leave. But, beginning in 1971, Chavez began to step away from the union's daily operations. Alarmed by tales of an elaborate grower-backed assassination plot and feeling heckled by Delano workers, he moved the union headquarters to a former sanatorium that he called La Paz, in the Tehachapi Mountains. Discontent increased, and the Teamsters, who hoped to move into the fields, scented blood. Early in 1973, they descended on the Coachella Valley, offering growers contracts that allowed direct hiring. Chavez, fighting back, began a strike that turned into a showdown. His union lost thirty-one contracts in Coachella and more in Lamont and Fresno. Soon it had lost members, too.

Chavez was undaunted. He put his trust in the growing profile of the movement. The union raised \$4.3 million that year, and its boycotts continued to be a cause célèbre. But it didn't win back its negotiating clout. After a year, it had failed to regain most contracts. Chavez's long-term tactics changed. As part of a 1973 funding deal with the A.F.L.-C.I.O., he agreed to push for legislation—legislation he'd previously balked at, worrying that it would neuter his guerrilla tactics. The result was California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act, signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown, securing collective bargaining for farmworkers. Chavez had continued to bristle at suggestions that he delegate some of his responsibilities. "I doubt anyone else but me can do it," he said.

Few people got the chance. Chavez became openly paranoid during the seventies. Increasingly seized by what Pawel calls a "basic mistrust of almost anyone with outside expertise," he began purg-

ing associates from the upper ranks of the union—quietly at first, and then in public confrontations. In 1977, taking a cue from Mao, he staged shouting matches at meetings to drive out colleagues. Sometimes he accused them of being spies for the Republicans or the Communists. ("You're a fucking agent," he seethed at a confused plumber.) The paranoia was not baseless—Chavez, like many figures on the left, was under F.B.I. investigation—but the reaction was extreme. When some he expelled tried to use the phone, La Paz security threatened to eject them forcibly.

By the late seventies, the union's California roots were bearing pop-psych fruit. Chavez was much taken with Synanon, a rehab center turned life-style cult, originally based in Santa Monica. Synanon's lucrative work revolved around an activity called the Game, in which community members attacked one another with true or invented accusations. Therapeutic work or even enlightenment—Synanon had already declared itself a religion—progressed by lobbing the hot potato of blame to someone else. Chavez loved the Game and wanted to start practicing it at La Paz. The problem with the union, he said, was that the Labor Relations Act had robbed it of its enemies, the growers; it had nothing to fight against. If La Paz could be turned into a model community like Synanon, it could sustain something bigger than a mere administrative body. Chavez said, "If this union doesn't turn around and become a movement, I want no part of it."

When Chavez's behavior starts to grow peculiar, Pawel's narrative, a little pallid until then, lights up. Was he the loving parent, disciplining his children to keep order and nurture autonomy, or the despot, punishing from fear? His private contradictions, throughout his life, were notably hazy. Unfortunately, on this front so is "The Crusades of Cesar Chavez." Pawel's book hews close to her archival research, avoiding dramatization and extensive exposition. The approach gives her criticism teeth—she lets the record speak for itself—but it does little to illuminate the dim corners of Chavez's inner life. When Chavez spends ten days in jail, for contempt of a boycott injunction, she tells



Your Anniversary
Immortalized
in Roman Numerals

3-Day Rush Available!
Crafted from Gold and Platinum
JOHN-CHRISTIAN.COM
OR CALL 888.646.6466

ADVERTISEMENT

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Small space has big rewards.

TO FIND OUT MORE, CONTACT
JILLIAN GENET | 305.520.5159
jgenet@zmedia-inc.com

THE
NEW YORKER

Wear our new
official hat to show
your love.



100% cotton twill.
Available in white and black.

newyorkerstore.com/hats



"For my next illusion, I shall convince young Steven that he has control over the trajectory of his life!"

us the number of the locker into which he placed his clothes, but scarcely probes into his state of mind. Sometimes Pawel's cool, recessive, just-the-facts narration goes silent when we most require elaboration. After that incarceration, Pawel writes that Chavez emerged "in the same clothes he had worn ten days earlier but"—bafflingly—"with considerably longer hair."

What Chavez seems to have lacked most was self-awareness. Speaking publicly about the challenges posed by the union's growth, he was sanguine. "When you start organizing, it's like a guy who starts juggling one ball," he explained at a conference in New York, in the early seventies. He went on:

After a little while, you got to get two balls, and you start juggling two balls. Your own speed. Because even up to that point, you've got everything under control. Then after a little while, more people come in, you've got to take three balls. And then four and then five and then six. And pretty soon you can't deal with it. And the organization breaks because the guy who's supposed to be leading wants to juggle a lot of balls and he can't do it. So he's got to make up his mind he's going to let some of the balls drop. But even more important, he's going to multiply himself to have more jugglers to handle all the balls that are coming at him.

The analogy is strange, not least because it depends on a mercenary calculus: since the juggler has an insatiable desire for new balls, he must constantly jettison older ones. And why the obligation to "multiply himself"? Chavez seems to have envisaged a moral movement of which he was the essential nucleus. Yet, for many union members, the U.F.W. was simply a labor organization, and its viability rested on the promise of fairer, more profitable labor arrangements—a goal of retaining benefits, not sustaining heroism. Chavez championed peaceful practices but had a warrior's taste for incursion and righteous conflict. When his followers required a governor, he'd answer as a general, dismissing their complaints and telling them to keep their armor ready by the door.

By 1988, it was clear that Chavez's dream of a vast national organization would go unrealized. Many of the union's best organizers had left. Chavez had passed through obsessions with "business" (he was an admirer of the corporate-management guru Peter Drucker) and with healing through the laying on of hands (he'd taken a

six-day mind-control workshop in Los Angeles). In a low moment, the union organized a protest against *Time*, which had described Synanon, not unreasonably, as a "kooky cult." Union leaders marched around La Paz brandishing the magazine and singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers." Everything declined from there. A desperate Chavez at one point proposed staffing an enfeebled labor action with alcoholics. ("A shitload of people are alcoholics in this country," he reasoned.) The union was sued by a grower for inciting violence during a strike, and reporters found it had misapplied more than a million dollars in federal funds. Just as Chavez had experimented with pop communalism in the seventies, he surfed the entrepreneurialism of the eighties, developing housing with non-union construction workers and co-founding a corporation that built two strip malls. Grower contracts, members, and the dues they generated dissipated all the while.

It was on the tail of these embarrassments that Chavez undertook another, very public, fast. In theory, he was protesting the exposure of farmworkers to pesticides—a long-standing cause of his. After some unexplained cancer clusters appeared in the Valley towns of McFarland and Earlimart, he tried launching a new grape boycott and, when it fizzled, stopped eating in "penance for those in positions of moral authority." He was sixty-one.

His ordeal is the focus of "Cesar's Last Fast," an illuminating new documentary directed by Richard Ray Perez and Lorena Parlee, Chavez's former press secretary, who contributed original footage but died before the film was completed. The film, which opens in a few cities later this month and which will subsequently air on Univision and Pivot, may be more helpful than Pawel's account in assessing the lion-in-winter phase of Chavez's career, in part because it shows the imagery involved: friends and followers clustered around Chavez's modest twin bed; Chavez himself hunched in the front row at Mass, barely participating.

"Penance is a personal act," Chavez's son Paul explains in an interview. "You're really speaking to yourself, and you're asking yourself to forgive you for your

own shortcomings.” Of course, not everybody makes a public performance of private sacrifice. “This is a man who refuses to eat so that all of us can continue to eat,” Luis Valdez, a colleague, says in the film. In other words: feel the guilt and take note. Grassroots protest did not feature in the middle-class world view of the Reagan era as it had in the late sixties; the 1988 sacrifice sought to show that *la causa* was more than just an artifact of those crazy times. By the thirtieth day of the fast, Chavez had lost thirty pounds. He had renal problems and muscle wasting. His doctors urged him to break his fast.

When he wouldn’t, Dolores Huerta and the Reverend Jesse Jackson devised an endgame. Chavez’s friends would pass the fast along: they’d each do three days or so, and the sacrifice would continue. Chavez agreed, and on the thirty-sixth day, a Sunday, he appeared at Mass. He was carried, limp, between the shoulders of his sons. Jackson and Martin Sheen were there, along with the family of Bobby Kennedy. Ethel Kennedy broke off a morsel of blessed bread, and Chavez finally ate. His mother sat beside his nearly lifeless body, weeping and stroking his face.

Did Chavez have a Christ complex? The question looms behind Pawel’s biography and Perez and Parlee’s film. “How did Cesar become such a powerful, brilliant organizer and leader?” the Reverend Chris Hartmire, of the National Migrant Ministry, asks in the documentary. “I think it was fundamentally his Catholic upbringing and his mother’s teachings.” Chavez’s ea-

gerness to take on moral responsibility through physical sacrifice, to lead an expanding moral movement, to be both humble and irreplaceably authoritative has its roots in the founding tropes of the Church. These affinities strengthened his project, as Hartmire suggests; they also slowly eroded it. Through the hard postwar years, farmworkers needed a political and cultural leader. Chavez’s faith helped make his ethical and organizational ambitions clear. But he also aspired to be a spiritual leader, and his efforts there had less stirring effects. Workers, in the end, already had a holy figure they could trust.

The United Farm Workers is now a shadow of the union that Chavez, in his finest hour, led to glory in the fields. Its membership lingers at a fraction of its peak constituency, and much of its essential work remains undone. “The conditions for farmworkers today are unfortunately very much as they’ve been throughout the decades,” Arturo Rodriguez, the current president, tells Perez. Pawel’s account suggests that Chavez disserved his cause, by failing to strengthen and preserve what he’d created. Yet his work, even now, reaches beyond the union’s fate.

Chavez died in 1993, possibly of an arrhythmia precipitated by fasting. At his request, he was buried in a casket of unvarnished pine. Fifty thousand mourners paid tribute. Pawel is fair on the subject of Chavez’s broader legacy: “The good outweighed the bad,” she agrees. But Perez’s film frames his importance more acutely. Though the documentary includes glosses on Cha-

vez’s organizational purges and his Synanon interlude, it is mostly flattering, emphasizing his contributions to Chicano culture. “The consciousness and pride that were raised by our union are alive and thriving inside millions of young Hispanics who will never work on a farm,” Chavez said in a 1984 address that closes the film. “If it could happen in the fields, it could happen anywhere—in the cities, in the court, in the city councils, in the state legislatures.”

In the vernacular of rights and opportunity, we often speak of ceilings: limits on how high a person can expect to rise before barriers intervene and everything beyond appears mysterious and obscure. When Chavez started organizing, Chicano farmworkers were trapped in a claustrophobic space: poor and voiceless at work, out of range of cities and their power, endlessly replaceable. Chavez knocked through this ceiling, but he did something more important, too. He brought into focus the bright, dizzy world of life beyond. In his wake, it was fathomable that a dark-skinned field worker could earn urban esteem, break bread with governors and Kennedys and movie stars, fall victim to the grand delusions of his age, and take great leaps and tumbles in the public eye. The barriers were gone; the system, for the first time, flowed upward. The original subtitle of Luna’s movie may have been more apt than the filmmaker realized. Chavez set out to be a moral leader, but, by the end of his life, that possibility had faded, and he had ended up something more interesting and compromised: an American hero. ♦

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2020 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XCVI, NO. 21, July 27, 2020. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for four combined issues: February 17 & 24, June 8 & 15, July 6 & 13, and August 3 & 10) by Condé Nast, a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Eric Gillin, chief business officer; Piper Goodspeed, head of brand revenue strategy; James Guilfoyle, executive director of finance and business operations; Fabio B. Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast Global: Roger Lynch, chief executive officer; Wolfgang Blau, chief operating officer and president, international; Pamela Drucker Mann, global chief revenue officer and president, U.S. revenue; Anna Wintour, U.S. artistic director and global content advisor; Mike Goss, chief financial officer; Samantha Morgan, chief of staff. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail subscriptions@newyorker.com. Give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable, you are dissatisfied with your subscription, you may receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For advertising inquiries, e-mail adinquiries@condenast.com. For submission guidelines, visit www.newyorker.com. For cover reprints, call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, call (212) 630-5656, or e-mail image_licensing@condenast.com. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker’s name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit www.condenast.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, advise us at P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, or call (800) 825-2510.

THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.



CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Michael Maslin, must be received by Sunday, July 26th. The finalists in the July 6th & 13th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 17th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“

”

THE FINALISTS

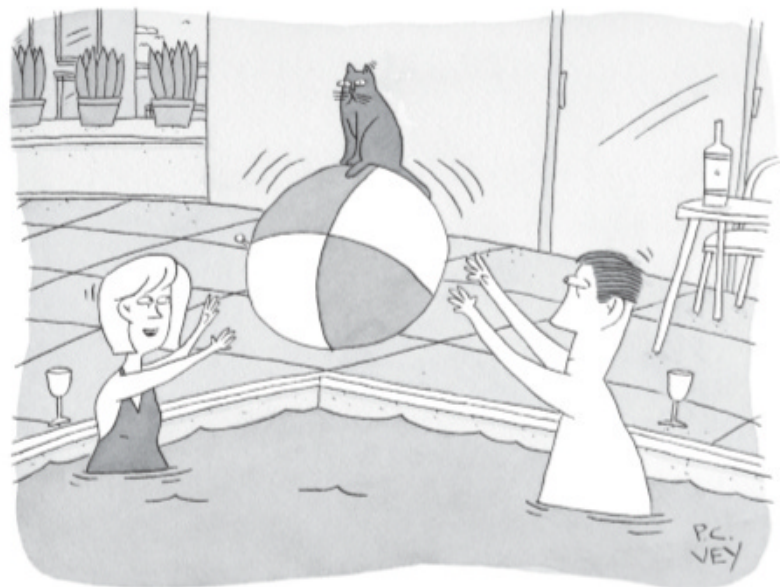


“Do you think we should add a password?”
Ruben Yzaguirre, McAllen, Texas

“Damn. Now I'm kinda hungry.”
Benim Foster, New York City

“He could have just written his name on his yogurt.”
Tyler Jacobs, Kearney, Neb.

THE WINNING CAPTION



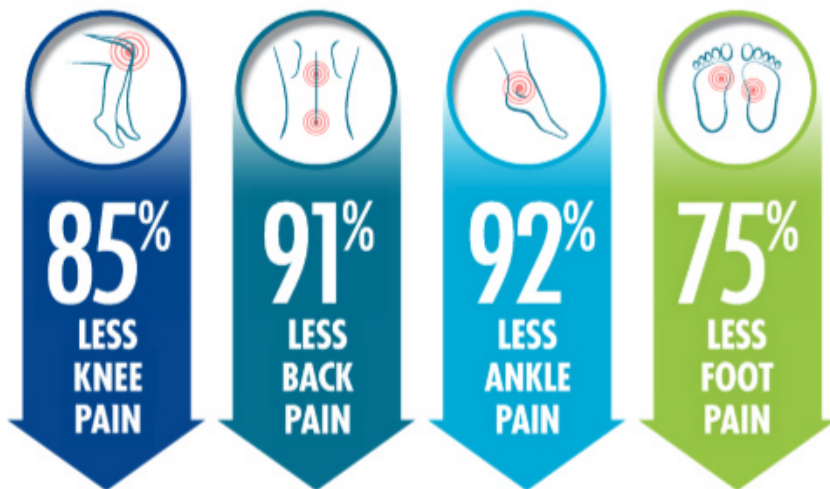
“You're right. It is easier with the ball.”
Keith Donohue, Wheaton, Md.

LIVE LIFE WITHOUT PAIN

Plantar Fasciitis • Arthritis • Joint Pain • Heel Spurs • Back & Knee Pain



PATENTED VERSOSHOCK® SOLE
SHOCK ABSORPTION SYSTEM



*Results of a double-blind study conducted by Olive View UCLA Medical Center.

“I’ve had lower back pain for years. Walking in these shoes was life changing for me. I feel like I’m walking on air.”

– Bill F.

Enjoy the benefits of exercise
with proven pain relief.

- ✓ Ultimate Comfort
- ✓ Renewed Energy
- ✓ Maximum Protection
- ✓ Improved Posture

G-DEFY ION \$155

**X-WIDE
WIDTH
AVAILABLE**

Men Sizes 7.5-15 M/W/XW

- Black TB9025MBB
- Red/Gray TB9022MRG

Women Sizes 6-11 M/W/XW

- Black/Blue TB9022FTL
- Gray/Teal TB9022FGU



**\$30 OFF
YOUR ORDER**

Promo Code NM1GMJ5

www.gravitydefyer.com

Expires October 31, 2020

Free Exchanges • Free Returns

100% Satisfaction Guaranteed

Call 1(800) 429-0039

Gravity Defyer Corp.

10643 Glenoaks Blvd. Pacoima, CA 91331



VersoShock® U.S Patent #US8,555,526 B2. This product has not been evaluated by the FDA. Not intended to treat, cure or prevent any disease. \$30 off applies to orders of \$100 or more for a limited time. Cannot be combined with other offers. 9% CA sales tax applies to orders in California. Shoes must be returned within 30 days in like-new condition for full refund or exchange. Credit card authorization required. See website for complete details.